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Fantasy and Science Fiction

DECEMBER

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One fault with the future societies presented in a lot of science fiction is the superficial way in which women are dragged into the future, almost as an afterthought (a dab of paint on the breasts, a couple of other cosmetic changes and let it go). Sonya Dorman's story is something else; its heroine is Roxy Rimidon of the Planet Patrol, an absolutely convincing and natural woman of the future. She is introduced in this suspenseful sf adventure tale, which as far as we know, is something of a departure for Sonya Dorman, and a fine one.

BYE, BYE, BANANA BIRD

by Sonya Dorman

THERE WE STOOD, NAKED AS BAbies, lined up on the cold tile floor waiting for the doctor. Our first day at the Planet Patrol Academy. We hoped, all eight of us lined up, to become Pippas: P.P.A. rookies. We'd have no rank until we completed our first assignments. Plenty of prestige, and good pay. Only women in top physical condition, between the ages of eighteen and twenty-three, were accepted, and thirty-two was the age at which we retired from active duty, usually to get married and teach at one of the Academies, sometimes to a good job in private industry. We were from several of the ten different Earth Dominions and we spoke the standard British and Swahili, as well as our Dominion dialects.

My friend Merle and I, both from America Dominion, had done a lot of talking before we applied, but the only decision we'd come to was that if we made the grade, we'd stay with it as long as we could.

Merle Rocca was standing next to me, coming out in goose pimples. A nice brunette, with glowing dark skin, and one brown eye. The other eye was a bright blue; she claimed that was why she was called Merle.

"Rimidon," the doctor said, and

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I stepped forward. I'd grown up in a family that was intense about physical culture, my mother doing her five miles a day on her stationary bike while the small, old-fashioned house shook and resounded to the crash of weights my father was trying to press in the basement gym. My younger brother jogged, ate wheat germ, and went camping with us. It was self-preservation that kept me in good shape.

The doctor did me over from crown to sole: five -foot eight, one-thirty-five pounds, no scars, no moles, no serious dental work, vision 20/20, measured out at 36-25-38.

He asked me, "Can't you get a couple of inches off the hips? You'll look like hell in the regulation pantaloons."

"Am I here to be admired?" I asked.

"Shut up," the Sergeant said. She was our housemother. A woman a lot heavier than I was and not as tall, but obviously active duty was behind her. I wondered where she had worked; no one on the staff had less than five years of active duty. Trained troubleshooters, we would go into a central Patrol pool on earth, and then could be called to special duty anywhere, including the colony planets Vogl and Alpha.

Merle was next; heart, lungs, weight, the works. She had that wiry, tireless build which could keep going forever. We both had brains, of course, or we wouldn't be here. Whatever special skills we might be hiding would be developed within the next eight weeks.

Sgt. Mother turned to me and said, "Rimidon, go to room five for a haircut."

I got back into my clothes moodily. I knew my hair would have to go, but I should have done as Merle did, and had it cut short before. You couldn't expect a service barber to do a decent job. "When's lunch?" I asked.

"You just had breakfast when you got here," the doctor said. "No wonder you carry that much weight."

Merle winked at me. I tied my boot laces and went into the corridor. Plain, pale walls; overhead lights behind plastic panels. Couldn't find room five. Four and six were there; also three and seven. On my first day, too. Graduated from college third in a class of two hundred and forty; top of the judo class; long-distance runner; fluent in four languages; played cello, guitar, and nose flute; couldn't find room five.

It was around the end, all by itself in its own little corridor with a tall glass window at the end. I took a glance out at the grounds. They were green and pleasant, set at the base of the mountain range. I was in the central part of the building, three stories high; the dormitory wings spread out at each side, long and lower. From out

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there on the lawn, the Academy building looked like a large and expensive prep school for unruly children.

"Rimidon, reporting for haircut," I said when I went in. The barber was a tall, middle-aged man, wearing a white jacket and the blackest Vandyke beard I ever saw. Grey eyes, a tender smile.

"Oh, darliing," he said as I sat in the chair. "What a headful! How can you bear to give it up."

"I'm willing to make some sacrifices," I said.

While he was chopping off handsful of my honey-yellow hair, I asked him, "Is this all you do, all day, cut off the girls' hair?"

"Don't be silly, darling. I work with Lt. Kimminy in code. I'm also married to her."

He took the clippers and bristled the back of my neck, but then he cut with a razor comb around the ears and front so my hair was shaped into waves and I still looked like the woman I was. "That do?" he asked.

"Lovely," I said. "I never would have hoped."

"Mustn't get discouraged so soon," he said, giving my biceps a squeeze. "Oh! that's good," he exclaimed, for I made him a muscle which must have bruised his hand.

The next two hours were spent in gym, in the swimming pool, and in bolting down a good but entirely inadequate lunch. We'd already taken the psychiatric tests, the achievement and mechanical tests, or they'd never have let us in the door.

We were lined up on hard chairs for a briefing. The colonel, a big, blond man, reminded us that the eight weeks were intended to test, in free situations, our ability to think and react quickly, our persistence in the face of difficulties, and how well we could take care of ourselves in emergencies, physical and mental. The first ten days would be spent primarily in physical training. I had a vision of a nine-foot spiked fence and a pond full of piranhas.

"Remember," Col. Wayser said, just when we thought he had finished, "there is no disgrace in failing. Only about half our rookies graduate and go out on Planet Patrol. You are the cream, the elite, of young women, or you wouldn't have made it this far. For those of you who do not make it into the P.P.A., there are still excellent job opportunities on all the planets. Good luck."

I hadn't paid much attention to him, though there was no escaping the deep rumble of his voice, until he turned his back to look out the window, presumably to show us we were dismissed. He had broad shoulders, broad back, and long, powerful legs. Merle and I exchanged glances, and grinned. Well, would he go for that one blue eye, I wondered, or did he like them tall? Roxy, I chided my-

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self, you mustn't try to make the colonel the first day here.

We were filing out, when Col. Wayser turned back from the window and rumbled, "Rocca. Rimidon." Merle and I turned and faced him.

"I understand you're friends," he said. "Went to college together. It's customary here to separate friends. We feel they're likely to give each other unwarranted support, or cover up for each other in case of mistakes."

"Yes, sir," we said.

Merle got a room on the ground floor of the west wing, and I had a corner room on the second floor of the east wing. We had wondered if it would be a dormitory set-up, or whether we'd be locked into little cells. What we had were comfortable, fairly large rooms, with a communal shower room on each floor.

Since I'd been up at five in the morning to catch the plane, then the service bus, I was sleepy. I took off my boots and lay down for a nap. On guard, on guard, I said to myself, as my eyes closed. Tarantulas in the washbasin? A colonel in the closet?

An ear-splitting squawk woke me. It was dark, and while I had noticed that grille over the south window, I hadn't really expected anything to issue from it, except perhaps poison gas. It was squawking my name, and instructions to get down to the lounge on the double. I found my boots, put my feet into them, knocked over the lamp and picked it up, got my boots laced and my belt buckled. True enough, I didn't look so great in the blue pantaloons that tucked into the boots. They were cut for thin women and must have been designed by some inactive person. I pulled the belt in another notch to show off my small waist, and went out. The electric clock over the stairway informed me I'd been asleep over three hours. I wondered if my first day at the Academy would be my last.

"Rimidon, this is the service," Sgt. Mother said when I entered the lounge. Besides the eight of us who'd arrived in the morning, there were half a dozen men, including the barber who was now in regulation blue uniform. Three of the men looked tough as turnips and mean as mules.

"Yes, madam," I said.

"You were on call to be here six o'clock sharp."

"Yes, ma'am."

Not a smile showed on any face. Merle carefully looked at the wall. They would throw me to the piranhas, me and my four languages and my nose flute and my mother's hopes for me.

"Siddown," she said. There were no chairs left vacant, so I folded my legs gracefully and sat on the floor, sinking down right where I was like a lotus disappearing. One of the mules snorted.

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Sgt. Mother gave us the details. "At eight o'clock, four of you are going out on night exercises with your instructors. Rocca and Sgt. Rhodes. Blitzstein and Cpl. Dale. Hardy and Lt. Fenniman. Rimidon and Sgt. Vichek." The snorting mule looked over all the heads at me, and I looked him back; he was tall, tough, gnarled, and gave off the brotherly warmth of an asteroid.

Merle's Sgt. Rhodes was small, dark, and good-looking, a lovely match for her. I wondered about Blitzstein's Cpl. Dale, who seemed too young to have retired to instructor, but when he moved, I saw that three fingers were missing from his left hand.

Dinner was roast chicken, mashed potatoes, and blueberry pie, but not enough of any of them. Merle was down at the other end of the table, talking with the little blonde Selma Blitzstein. Sgt. Mother was wearing lipstick which made her look a whole lot better, almost as if she could be someone's mother. We had received no instructions about makeup, so a lot of it was apparent; women's bravado, that last smear of color before facing the firing squad. Merle had on gold lipstick and mascara to match; it looked great on her. I hadn't had time to apply any, but I have good skin and large, brown, dark-lashed eyes, so I never favored much extras.

After dinner we had half an hour in which to relax. I was surprised to see Blitzstein sitting with some kind of small tapestry frame, and stood behind her chair to watch those thin, delicate fingers of hers work in red and gold thread, green and peacock blue, a little at a time, slow, easy, with exquisite patience that drew us all to watch, and admire. Gradually, a bird appeared. I'd never seen anything like that work.

By eight, booted and snapped into dark blue jackets, we assembled on the darkening front lawn. A big light blazed over the front door; beyond its illumination the forest lay quiet and black. Sound of water, brook or small river, somewhere. Smell of pine trees. I could feel my senses key up and quiver. Sgt. Vichek took my elbow sternly and turned me toward the woods. "Move," he said.

"Would you like to tell me anything about this patrol?" I asked, walking toward what seemed a solid wall of trees and underbrush.

"Roxy Rimidon," he said. I could have sworn he was grinning, the feel of it lay heavy on my back. "Keep moving."

"Yes, Sgt. Mule," I said under my breath.

I'd spent plenty of time in the woods, growing up, and with my brother, too, on mountain climbs. It must be on my record. None of the forested areas left in this Dominion are completely dense;

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there's always a way through. Bonny briar bushes, I realized, getting raked across one cheek. I squinched down to get under some low branches, kept my forearm raised in front of my face, groped with my boots. What if I could lose the mule? How well did he know these woods?

After the first thirty yards or so of thick underbrush, it opened out a little. The trees were larger, the smell of pine stronger. I began to move out, quietly, conscious of Vichek close behind me, but dropping back a little as I increased my speed. We did about half a mile like that. My eyes now had good night vision, and there appeared to be something unusual about the area we were entering. The openness was all on a lower level; above, it was dense and tangled. Not right. Not nature's way of doing it. Man-made. Look out, Roxy, I told myself, something is either going to drop out of a tree onto your head, or something is going to give way under your feet.

My nerves began to tingle with warning. Vichek was still audible behind me. God, that man had big, heavy feet; he was lumbering along, and snorting now and then as though he had bugs up his nose. The warning tingle rose to a high twang and I swerved, fast, to the right, and plunged into the underbrush. Vichek came to a dead halt and switched on a powerful flashbeam.

Another three feet forward and I'd have walked into a net spread on the ground. Would've been hoisted like a fish. I crouched, invisible, among the saplings and briars. The light danced around as Vichek sought me. I stopped breathing. I practiced not being. There is a way to do it, a way to become leaf, twig, log, bark.

"Rimidon," he said in a soft voice. I was growing a shelf of fungus. My feet had sunk below the leaf mold, seeking a deep grip. He kept the light moving. "Okay," he said, "come on out."

He took a few steps backward and began to search another area. I breathed once. Leaves unfurled from my fingers. His big boots were making a lot of angry noise. Nothing like an angry mule to discourage a person. Inch by inch I moved backward, deeper, into the brush. Vichek swore noisily. He stumbled over something, recovered his balance, and asked God to send him back to active duty on Vogl. By this time I was thirty feet away from him, and wondering how to work my way around behind him, to the path back. Did I dare lose track of him?

Little by little I crawled through. Mosquitoes found me, and feasted; sharp bits of bark got down inside my shirt. I was sticky, tired, and disgusted. What kind of training is this, I wondered? Why don't they just take us for a good camping trip in the moun-

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tains? I made a couple of false starts toward the path and finally found it, though it wasn't cleared enough to be called a path. Before I stood up, I listened, but there wasn't a sound; no boots, no snorts, no mule. To hell with you, I thought. Just the same, I stepped with great care, with great quiet.

Finally, I was close enough to the edge of the woods which fronted the Academy to see the blaze of light over the front door. A horse fell on me. I whipped over as I went down and struck upward, got a good, solid punch landed on his face, and then he had his knee in my stomach and both my arms pinned.

"Give up?" he asked.

"Son of a bitch," I said, and spat out leaf mold. He had a terribly big, bony knee.

"Nah, nah," Vichek said, hauling me to my feet. "I grew up in the Sierras. You gotta admit you met your match."

"You can move quiet when you want to," I admitted.

He snorted a laugh. "Sure I can. I was afraid I was overdoing the noise, on the way out. God, *woman, what do you weigh?*"

"None of your business," I said, scraping bits of bark off my sweating neck. We went through the last of the woods onto the lawn and came into bright light, where Col. Wayser was standing. Sgt. Mother, a notebook in her hand, looked up at us. She stared at Vichek, so I turned to look, and was delighted to see one of his eyes beginning to swell shut.

"Grade A," Vichek said, looking a little grim. "She's fast as a bobcat for all that weight."

It wasn't bad enough the mule fell on me, but had to remark on my weight in front of the colonel. As if Vichek didn't outweigh me by fifty pounds.

The colonel glanced at me as I went by and I smiled at him, but he only quirked one corner of his mouth a little. Sgt. Mother said, "You're off duty now. You can go to the lounge, if you like."

After I'd shaken the scraps of tree and leaf from my shirt, and combed my hair, I got myself a tall glass of ice water and whiskey, and sat down. Vichek walked in, got himself a stein of beer, and came over and sat beside me on the couch. He took a big swallow of beer, and set the stein down. His eye was shut tight and turning blue. "You coulda belted me on the chin, instead," he said thoughtfully.

"Sorry. You didn't give me a chance to be delicate about my aim."

"No kidding, what do you weigh?"

"One-thirty-five."

"Yeah? I woulda guessed a lot more."

Blitzstein and Cpl. Dale came in, sat down with glasses of beer, and started a chess game. The oth-

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ers slowly appeared, except Merle and her little Sgt. Rhodes. The chess game proceeded. I had another drink, Vichek leafed through a magazine, the p.a. called Merle Rocca and John Rhodes, who were an hour overdue.

"They got the water patrol," Dale said to Vichek.

Merle swims like a minnow. I wondered if she had drowned Rhodes, or if she was sitting in the river with just her nose out to get a breath, while he ran up and down looking for her. Or perhaps Rhodes had drowned Merle.

After I finished the drink I got up. "I'm going to sleep," I said. Vichek didn't move, and I looked down at him. "I suppose you're my instructor for the whole eight weeks?"

"Ain't that our luck," he said, tenderly putting one hand over his black eye. "I'm not allowed to damage you, so you might take that into account, next time."

"Indeed I will," I said with relish. "I won't forget it for a moment."

There was a central stairway, right opposite the big front door, and I was on the first step when the door opened and in came Merle and Rhodes, both of them sopping wet. Sgt. Mother's voice shouting recriminations, threats, and reorientations, followed them in.

"Hi," Merle said when she saw me. Rhodes stood looking downcast and running rivulets onto the bamboo matting.

I said, "Been for a swim? Nice night for it."

Mere glanced back at Rhodes. He raised his dark eyes in supplication to her and she smiled, and started up the stairs with me. "How did you do?" she asked.

"The sergeant won," I said. "What did you do to Rhodes? He looks unhappy." We were on the second floor of my wing by now, and Merle would have to go back to her own quarters. She was pressing the water out of her hair with both hands.

"I'm sorry I didn't realize he'd be faulted for us being so late. Did you ever try to get back into wet clothes after you've taken them off? It takes forever."

"See you at breakfast," I called after her as she ran down the stairway.

We were allowed a night's undisturbed sleep. On waking, I naturally checked my dreams, found one involving Col. Wayser and shut it off before I arrived at the consequences. I was a rookie, after all. He was head of the Academy, young as he seemed. There were other Planet Patrol Academies, quite a lot of them including the centers where the men studied. But the colonel was the backbone of this one, probably married, certainly used to girls making eyes at him.

Sgt. Mother had breakfast with

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us, then each of us was assigned to a study course. I drew Transport, of all things. I thought a duller subject would be hard to find, and went looking gloomily for Lt. Nelson's room. First floor, rear, and Lt. Nelson with a pleasant voice, soft temper, and that rare, plum-black skin. The walls were covered with charts; air routes and underground; snow, sand, bog, fen, and mountain tramway. Every means of transport the planets offered were illustrated in her charts. She knew everything about each planet's transport system: the problems, the values, the changes in progress.

Blitzstein and the thin girl Hardy were my companions in this class. We learned how to operate skimmers and how to trap escapees in Vogl's numberless swamps and watery byways. Lt. Nelson took us out to a swamp half a mile from the building, put us on Vogl bogshoes, and watched us flounder and spash. My eyes were full of mud, my knees soggy, and my muscles aching, before Lt. Nelson called it a morning. Immaculate in her blue shirt and pantaloons, with polished boots and unmarred make-up, she escorted us back.

She said, "Rimidon, if you'd sweat off a few pounds, you'd be good on those bogshoes, you have remarkable balance."

"Yes, ma'am," I said, "Do you know I can ride a horse?"

She smiled. "They don't use them, except in the resorts. Not for transport. How did you learn?"

"My grandmother was an equestrienne," I said proudly.

"Ah, that's one of our lost arts," she said with sadness. "Why don't you skip dessert at lunch?"

So they began to persecute me, a pound here, a pound there; lean meat and vegetables, fruit juice instead of beer; swim, run, jump, climb, and many an evening trying to get rid of Vichek in woods, hills, and swamps. I never succeeded, though I came pretty close a few times. I learned to respect him a lot; tough as he was, he never pushed it too far, he never lost his temper, and sometimes he even said I was doing fine.

Merle began turning out triumphs in the code-and-computer department; she was the pet of Lt. Kimminy who headed up C & C, and was married to our barber. They had a son in Patrol on Alpha, and a daughter studying music in Asia Dominion. Lt. Kimminy wore a vague expression and had a soft voice, which disguised a crackling sense of humor and a genius for cybernetics. I liked her, though I wasn't one of her best students.

"Where did they find all these people?" Merle asked, one of the few times we had a chance to talk. "And it looks like such an innocent building, especially the basement."

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The basement was larger than the building on top of it. Lts. Kimminy and Holder worked down there with their computers. One section, at the eastern end, was walled off; a heavy metal door carried a sign which said: Detonation and Deactivation. Selma Blitzstein had disappeared in there the third day and only reappeared at meals. I thought of those thin, precise fingers threading the tapestry bird, threading the little wires, deactivating the little bombs. No question but what her special talent had been discovered.

"I suppose one day we'll be staff," Merle said. "I can't see that far ahead, though. You know, they transferred Johnny Rhodes—they're tougher on staff than they are on rookies."

"I wondered what happened to him."

"I told the colonel it was my fault, but they transferred him out and now I've got Mule Two, that Sgt. Limon." She leaned over and tweaked my sleeve. "Still got your eye on the colonel?"

"Don't see him much. We had the standard interview, I kept a straight face, a stiff upper lip, and my chest out. What do you think he's doing here? He didn't have to retire before thirty-five and he can't be more than thirty."

Merle shrugged. "Maybe he's just recuperating from something. He could go back on active if he applied, I guess."

"He'd have to go all through physical again. Not that I see a thing wrong," I added, and we grinned again at each other.

When Sunday came they promised us the day off, and we had it, but of course we were not allowed to go anywhere. There had been a fire alarm (false) at two in the morning; we fell down rope ladders or tumbled out first-floor windows; none of the lights worked; people yelled; Sgt. Mother called out our names and expected a response. Somewhere, two girls had stayed in bed, and this morning they went home. Leaving six of us.

At three in the afternoon we were called into the lounge for tea. The minute I saw that tray of pastry I felt better. Then I saw the colonel with a woman who must be his wife, not bad looking, but a hopeless case. She simpered when she shook hands, said she was so thrilled to meet us, said she always adored these afternoons on Sunday when she had a chance to see the new cream of the crop, the flower of earthside womanhood. As if she were waiting to see us fed to the Minotaur.

I took a cream puff from the tray, bit out half of it, and looked earnestly at the colonel. He met my eyes, and seemed taken aback. "Rimidon! Aren't you on orders to drop five pounds?"

I swallowed the rest of the cream puff almost whole, and said, "Yes, sir."

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Lt. Nelson came to my rescue, saying, "She's already dropped the five pounds, sir."

"Doesn't look it," the colonel remarked, turning away.

"Sir!" I yelled, taking a step forward. Merle caught me by the arm, but I shook her off. I stalked over to Col. Wayser and his lady, who involuntarily turned to face me.

She simpered. "Oh, my dear," she said, "I know those little sweets are so tempting, I don't blame you. I think you look in very good trim."

I look glorious, you skinny little bitch, I thought.

The colonel said mildly, "Rimidon, I didn't intend to be rude."

"No, sir," I said, and went back and took a chocolate eclair from the tray. Sgt. Mother edged me back against the wall. "You don't yell at the colonel," she hissed in my ear.

"Academy colonels don't shame their rookies in public," I hissed back. "Especially in front of their wives."

"Some wife," Sgt. Mother said. "She goes running after every general she sees, a colonel isn't enough."

Chewing the last of the eclair, I turned my head to look into Sgt. Mother's eyes. "What is Col. Wayser doing here, anyway?" I whispered.

She glanced around to make sure no one could hear us. Then she answered, briefly, "He was a Zix pilot before they offered him this job."

I should have known. A Zix pilot is done and finished at twenty-five; men older than that are too slow, can't take the stress. Next time I'll smile when I yell at him, I promised myself.

On Monday I crossed the river by tree, leaving Vichek, I thought, on the bank behind me, but he got across in perfect silence and was waiting for me, and yanked me down out of the oak where I had stopped to rest. On Tuesday I walked right into one of those nets and got winched up into the air, while Vichek stood below, and laughed. Early Wednesday evening, Hardy and I were given small backpacks, and Cpl. Dale with Lt. Nelson took us on a terrific, tough climb into the mountains to what looked like the top rock in the world.

There they, along with daylight, left us quite suddenly, with no fire, compass, knives, or coffee pots. Our packs contained one pair of clean socks and a chocolate bar each.

"Oh, hell," Hardy wailed, "I hate camping. I'm a biotronic engineer. And a translator."

Nothing to do, but lie down, with the backpacks for pillows, and to the music of foxes and nightbirds, we fell asleep. Dawn was cool. We put on our clean socks, laced our boots, and ate

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our chocolate. It seemed easy enough, given the sun for direction, to find our way back. It seemed a pointless exercise, until we heard that *whickoo!* and the crackling ricochet off the rocks at our feet. We both fell flat.

"Oh, hell," Hardy said, "are they going to shoot us before we graduate? Did they give us any weapons?"

"Brains, Hardy. We have brains, muscle, Enovid, lipstick, clean socks, pills for cramps, and the promise of a pension. We can last it out."

Whickoo! Light gauge, one pretty far down the mountain slope to the east, another too damn close, nearly as high as we were, to the left. Can't dig a hole in rock. Nothing but scrub to hide us. The sun was getting higher and hotter.

Hardy said, "I think we ought to figure out what they want us to do, and do the opposite."

"Let's inch back while you're thinking."

It is not easy to inch back up a slope covered with thorn bushes and sharp outcrops, without getting any part of you high enough in the air for a target. Inch for inch, they were coming along with us. *Whur, whur;* the sound of a Clam gun, notable for the burns which it inflicts, as well as for its name which we'd always supposed was a joke: Constant Laser Automatic Motivater.

We sweated in the warming August air. Our clothes ripped, then the skin on our knees and elbows, as we headed for cover.

"They're not going to get me," Hardy muttered.

"Me neither. Costs too much to train us."

We almost achieved the ledge where we'd spent the night when they shot up a whole barrage of rock fragments in front of us. Hardy turned head over heels backward and rolled down the slope, bounced off a boulder and crashed into some bushes. Bounce, roll, crash, I joined her. "Oh, hell," she said when I lay beside her. There was not another sound.

"It's all so pointless," she said. "We've heard gunfire before, what are they out to prove? I should have stayed with Lt. Fennimen, we were just getting into Japanese grammar."

But it wasn't pointless. We found we were limited to about fifteen square feet of the mountain, including our little spiky nest in the bushes. The sun broiled us, though we'd taken off our jackets. Hardy kept covering her nose with one hand; she had very fair skin and it was turning a blistered red.

I'd been thinking about our unseen companies; were they staff, or were they rookies? Not rookies, I decided; surely they wouldn't trust rookies with all that weaponry turned on us.

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Hardy suggested, "It's our job to get down past them, and it's their job to keep us here."

"Must be they expect us to wait for dark. I think we better show them how patient and persistent we are, and do just that."

About ten minutes later, Hardy said, "I got to take a leak."

"Go ahead, stand up and find a place."

"You're kidding!" She began to creep around to the other side of the scrub growth. I could hear her mutter, "Eyes, eyes, everywhere, what do they want, I'll burst."

I wished she hadn't mentioned it, because now that she had mentioned it, I had to go too. I pretended I felt empty. After a while, Hardy crawled back, and lay beside me. A half hour later she said, "On the other hand, perhaps they just want us to think they'll wait for us. Maybe all we have to do is find our way down in the dark."

"We could have done that last night. Booby traps?"

"Possibly," she admitted.

By late afternoon it was my turn to crawl around to the other side of the bushes. As soon as it was dark, we'd try to move, and nothing hampers rapid action like a full bladder. There had been no more shots, as long as we stayed put.

"You feel brave?" Hardy asked at dusk. "Want to stand up?"

"You stand up," I said.

She took my hand. "We'll both stand up." We got to our knees first, and peered around, like a couple of rabbits. Silence. A few late birds in the sky. I watched them to see if they avoided any special area, but they did not. We both stood up. Silence. The sun sank. We sat down, looking into the darkness below. "We just walk down, is that it?" I asked.

"Sure, if you can remember how we got up."

Night came up faster and faster along the slopes; ate our boots, eclipsed our knees, swallowed our hearts. "I got a feeling," Hardy said. "I got a strong feeling they're waiting for us to start down."

"So do I."

Night buried our heads and we disappeared.

Hardy asked, "What do you suppose is on the other side of this mountain?"

"The backside," I breathed. "Oh, yes, the backside of the mountain, while they wait for us on the front."

"As I recall, it was much steeper and rougher than the way we came up," Hardy said, and rose to her feet.

So in the darkness we began feeling our way back toward the rocky roof on which we had slept the night before, trying to be quiet. Then slowly, slowly, starting the descent one step at a time. What made us think we could do

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it quietly, if at all, I can't imagine. We fell over each other, over rocks, bushes, lumps in the ground, ghosts, armies, colonels, and banquet tables. Now and then we sat down and talked about iced tea or beer. Hardy swore she heard a fountain, and I asked her if she'd ever seen the famous ones in Europa Dominion. We went on crashing and thumping, wondering why the waiting group hadn't heard us. Or had they heard us, would they be waiting for us at the bottom?

About midnight we were so exhausted we lay down, and looked at the faint stars in the sky. "Hardy, actually we don't know what's down there at the back of the mountain. We might have to go up over another one, if there's no valley way out."

"I bet there's a river. All along the edges it's got chips of mint-flavored ice and every two feet there's a platter of fried chicken."

"And right in the middle of the river is a little green island made of mattress, and there sits the colonel, brown as a berry and blond on top."

"Rimidon, don't you ever think of anything but the colonel?"

"Seldom," I said. "I'll take a half hour watch and think about him, while you sleep."

I'm proud to say I did stay awake until she'd had her nap, and she stayed awake while I had mine. Too soon, we were stumbling downward again. "We gotta make it before dawn," Hardy kept mumbling.

"Whole thing is stupid," I mumbled back. We were both light-headed. It was a wonder we didn't fall down the rest of the way and lie dead at the bottom. Most of the time we watched our invisible feet. Boulders and shrubs stood out as darker masses so we could avoid them, and in a weary trance we kept going, sometimes sliding yards on our heels and bottoms, sometimes falling into thorny ground pockets.

We started climbing up the next mountain before we were aware that the direction of the slope had changed. "Oh, hell," Hardy chanted, when we found out what we were doing. We went back, left, right, found a kind of rocky channel like a dry river bed, and began to trudge along it. Very gradually it swung around to the north, which should take us back toward the Academy. We stumbled more and more as the sky began to lighten; we went slower and slower. I began to feel it wasn't worth it because there were any number of jobs I could have had without trying this one. I was sure I couldn't make it, but as long as Hardy kept on, I would, too.

She stopped to look at the sky, which was a bright pearl color. "Bet you dropped another five pounds," she said.

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I was too tired to answer. Our feet were blistered, and I was thinking of chewing some leaves or bark. Hardy started on once more, and I plodded close behind her. There was a ridge of hill running out from the mountain we had crossed; if we could just get round that ridge, I thought. If we can just hold out until we see what's over there.

After a long time, we made it. Hardy stopped so short I bumped into her. There was a jeep standing there. Vichek was leaning up against it, cleaning his nails.

"Made it, did you," he said, looking up. Hardy staggered over toward him, and I staggered after her.

"Now what would you girls like more than anything else in the world?" Vichek asked, reaching behind him into the jeep.

"Water," Hardy gasped.

I said, "Colonel Wayser," and fell down. But not unconscious. Vichek squatted down and tenderly held the canteen to my mouth while I gulped and spluttered.

"You didn't mean that, did you?" he asked, looking concerned.

"Mean what?" I sat up and held the canteen to my mouth.

"About Ray Wayser."

Hardy was sitting in the jeep eating, so I got to my feet, somehow, and reeled around to the other side to join her. She handed me a sandwich and I fell to. Vichek got in behind the wheel and started the engine. He was smiling to himself, and Hardy asked crossly, "What's so funny?"

"Oh, they were all betting you'd filter down just before dawn, and I swore you'd come over on this side. I had some fight to get out here with a rescue vehicle. You can thank Sgt. Mother for the chow. She was the only one agreed with me that Rimidon had to go over the mountain. Like the bear in the song."

He began to sing as we moved off, bouncing over rocks and ridges. "Oh, the bear went over the mountain," Sgt. Vichek sang, and after another drink from the canteen, and in between bites of her second sandwich, Hardy joined in, and after a while, I did. What else could we do?

There was no one around when we got back. I fell into bed, torn pants, bloody scratches, and all, and slept until dark, when Sgt. Mother woke me. "Come on, Rimidon," she said. "You don't want to miss dinner, do you?"

"Not for anything. Have I time for a shower?"

"Ten minutes." She came on into the room and looked at me reflectively. "Perhaps I should remind you to take your pill?"

"Oh, yes," I said, reaching under my shirt to the waterproof tablet case. "Thank you, Mother. Maybe you better say something

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to Hardy. It was one thing we forgot."

"You're not supposed to forget anything," she said, and went out, but she paused in the hall to call back, "you and Hardy are the first to go down the other side of the mountain."

I walked to the doorway on my blistered bare feet. "Tell me something. If we hadn't gone down that way, if we'd tried to come down the way we went up, what would have happened?"

"Oh, I'm not allowed to say," she said, looking shocked.

Typical. They never tell you anything. I gulped my hormone tab, took my shower, got into clean clothes, and ran down for dinner.

During the next week classroom studies began to pile up. Ballistics, statistics; voiceprinting, codebreaking, mapmaking; language arts, chess games with the computer; transport, spacesports, mobs: infiltrating of, reducing of, containing of; politics, diplomacy, space law. Our heads nearly burst, and when our brains were so tired we couldn't think any more, we climbed up and down ropes, hiked over more mountains, got out of skintight skirts under water, were strapped into free-fall simulators (Brighton and Krantz got ill and Krantz fainted, both were sent home); and every second day the doctor ran us through for a physical.

I had dropped seven pounds and expected him to be pleased.

"What are you doing, eating on the sly?" he said. "You're still 36-25-38 and look like hell in those pantaloons."

"Wait'll you see me in a dress," I promised.

My evening jaunts into the forest with Vichek were over, fortunately. I didn't see so much of him now, though he took me out on the firing range, where we found out I was a very good shot. I learned to handle some sophisticated weapons with speed and ease. He never said much, except once he asked, "You didn't mean it, about Colonel Wayser?"

"I was delirious," I said sincerely.

Vichek looked me in the eye, like man to man. "The hell you were," he said. "You know how many girls have made passes at the colonel?"

"Hundreds," I guessed.

"Right. So what makes you think you're any different?"

"I'm not, except I'm the worst chess player you ever had here."

We started to walk back from the firing range. Vichek said, "Well, you can't be good at everything."

"I don't seem to have any special talents."

"You got persistence. You and Hardy going down the other side of the mountain. They never thought you'd try it."

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"It was Hardy's idea. And I wouldn't have made it, except for following her."

"You don't have to tell anybody that."

"But it's true."

"You don't deserve the colonel," Vichek said.

"The colonel is married."

"The colonel is rumored to be dumping her. Too many generals in the field, I heard. Not that she'd be a loss to us," and he stamped off ahead of me.

Well, that's all very nice, I thought, but I'd hardly go through what I've been through these weeks, just to settle down with the colonel. I intend to see the colonies, and earn my money, before I settle down. I'm only twenty-two. Nearly the age at which a Zix pilot retires, huh? I reminded myself.

All Graduation Day amounted to was that the four of us, me, Merle, Hardy, and Blitzstein, could eat our breakfast in leisure and lounge around speculating on our assignments. Usually, it was six months on jobs, then two months off, then back to work. We also talked about clothes, having been told we could graduate in dresses. The Academies really understood their students very well.

"I'm going to wear the orange one," Merele said, "with those big, black beads from Alpha, and a pint of perfume." Myself, I was fed up with boots and high-necked shirts, so I felt just the way she did. We would have a week in which to visit our families, or go somewhere else to relax, before starting work. I asked Merle if she was going home.

She shook her head. "Johnny Rhodes is teaching at a P.P.A. in Paris. I'm going to fly over to see him."

"Lucky you," Selma Blitzstein said. "I'm going home and be shown off to my relatives."

"Joan?" I asked Hardy. Her nose had finally stopped peeling, and she looked pretty good.

She smiled at us. "Yes, I'm going home for the week; I'll be glad to. Dad's working on a new pulmonary system at the hospital, and he's promised to show me how it is put together."

My things were packed, all but the dress I was going to wear. I took my time with my make-up, and perfume all over, and then the dress, which weighed half an ounce and went on over nothing but my own skin. My hair had grown out a lot, so I gave it a good electric brushing, and then clipped the little diamonds in my ears. They were a present from my mother, though what she thought I'd do with diamonds at the Academy, I can't imagine.

Sgt. Mother was walking the halls, trying to hurry us up. When she saw me, she asked, "What is that?"

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"It's my Tucci dress," I explained, "and I'm going to wear it to graduate in."

"I don't believe that's been done before, here, either," she said, and went away.

I waited a little, since I didn't plan to be obscured by the mob. The dress looked like silver fog on me and it ought to be seen in its full effect. All the staff were in the lounge, and the colonel, without his lady. Hardy went in, there was a pause, and I made my entrance. I hadn't counted on the midday sunshine which streamed through the front windows. The dress was opaque in shadow or lamplight, but in bright sunlight it was pure as a pane of glass.

"Rimidon!" the colonel said in astonishment.

"Yes, sir," I said. "As you can see, I've dropped ten pounds."

Sgt. Vichek turned around and pounded silently on the wall with one fist. Sgt. Mother went from window to window, closing the screens. Merle, Hardy, and Blitzstein closed in before me, but I ducked around and stood in line with them.

Lt. Nelson raised her eyebrows, everyone else looked solemn, and Colonel Wayser began to read off our names and assignments.

"Merle Rocca, Waterways Commission, Vogl." He shook her hand, and she stepped back into line.

"Selma Blitzstein, Fringe Patrol, Alpha."

"Joan Hardy, Medical Intelligence, Vogl."

Col. Wayser cleared his throat and went on. "Roxy Rimidon, Island Patrol, Caribbean Area." His handshake was firm, but I got out of it at top speed and stepped back. Caribbean, probably Cuba Dominion, earthside, right here on this planet; routine checking of birds and coconuts, probably. I couldn't have done that badly. Like the others, I'd dreamed of a hard, dangerous job, and all the sights to be seen out there. I'd been through some hard training. I wanted the money, the glory, and most of all, the sense of accomplishment when I got my rank. I could feel the blush spreading upward.

"Rimidon, you're turning red all over," Col. Wayser said, and there was a spark of laughter in his eyes.

When I got that damn dress off, I'd burn it to ashes.

"How bad did I do?" I asked. "What did I flunk?"

Lt. Nelson said, "You did very well. If you'd flunked anything, you wouldn't be here today."

The colonel said, "More than half our graduates get their first assignments here. Earth has eight billion busy people we must keep track of. But if you request reassignment, we will consider it."

"No, sir, I'll take what I get."

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"We know you can take it," the colonel said, and his eyes sparked again, though his mouth was sober. "Good luck to all of you," he said.

I went back upstairs, shoved the Tucci dress into a corner of my suitcase, and put on a plain black skater that covered me completely. Merle came in and we gave each other a couple of bear hugs, and danced a couple of wild steps together.

She said, "They've got some volcanic mountains down there on those islands, isn't that nice for you, you can climb them."

"Oh, thanks, Pippa Merle," I groaned.

"Listen, we both made it. When I get back I'll buy you a drink. So long, Pippa Roxy."

"So long. When I'm a lieutenant I'll buy you a whole green jug."

I closed the suitcase and carried it downstairs. Sgt. Mother was there to say goodbye. "It's been a pleasure knowing you, Pippa," she said, and we shook hands.

Outside, we got into the service bus that was waiting to take us to the airport. After I was settled in a seat by the window, I looked out, and saw the colonel, his blond hair blazing in the sunshine. When he saw me watching, he saluted, so I kissed my hand to him. After all, I was off duty.

When I got home, it was so neat and deserted I could tell Mom was off on a visit or tour. I put through a call to her office and Maxine looked out at me. She smiled and said, "Oh, Roxy, Dr. Rimidon's gone to a convention in Honolulu, and then she has a lecture in Helsinki. How long will you be home?"

"Not long. Thanks, Maxine."

"I guess I better call you Pippa now?"

"After all these years, I'd be very offended if you didn't go on calling me Roxy."

There was a pause, while her round and pleasant face continued to shine brightly on the video. "Roxy," she said, whispering. "I'm not supposed to say anything, but your mother's been proposed for head of the Bone Bank."

"No wonder she's busy. I'm leaving Friday, so if she isn't back before that, tell her I hope she makes it."

"Good luck, Pippa."

We signed off, and I sat for a while, thinking about almost nothing in order to rest myself. Then I unpacked my few things, and took my cello out to tune it and practice for half an hour.

After lunch, I took my cello and went down to the Monorail Station. For a little time it was as if I'd never been to the Academy, riding the Monorail with the cello propped lovingly against my thigh, my arm round its neck,

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close as a pair of lovers, and the roofs and hazy blue sky outside the windows.

I took the walkway over to the Rep Dome, which stood like a black half-melon at the center of the park. Although travel and other expenses were credited to my Patrol card while I was on duty, nothing was free when I was on leave, so I paid my way into the Repertory Dome, the standard fee for performer and spectator alike. The door swished shut behind me and I was in the first of the lamp-lighted halls. This being my home district, I didn't have to look at the directory, but automatically turned into the left-hand corridor. The theatre fronts that faced onto the corridor were composed of Kerr cells; when a performance was in progress or the casting complete, the walls were opaqued and darkened. Set into each of these front walls was the casting plaque, and the first one I passed was blinking on and off: *second violin* (Grady Quartet in G), *second violin* (Grady Quartet in G).

Spoken Arts was at the other side of the dome. As I went down this side, I passed several darkened walls: Mozart Sonatas for Two Hands, Gevenni's Symphony in A.

The next wall was lighted. Aha! The plaque read: Brahms Double Concerto. Coming toward me along the hall was a boy of fifteen, carrying his cello, and we pretended not to see each other, but there was no help for us since we got to the theatre door at the same time.

"Oh, come on," he said to me. "I cut Physics just to get here on time."

The door opened before I could answer and the conductor looked out. It was Maria Guayez, who knew me. "Roxy!" she said. "You're just in time." She smiled at the boy, and said to him, "Georgi, you are not to come during school hours. You know that."

He gave me a very bitter look, picked up his cello, and went away. "Come in, come in," Maria said, taking me by the neck of my cello very tenderly. "I am so glad to see you again. But you have not played for weeks. What must we listen to?"

Several of the musicians were familiar to me, as we had played together under Maria Guayez before. At one time my brother had thought himself in love with her, and instead of going over to the other dome side for the Group Ad Lib cycle, he would sit in the front row and never take his eyes off Maria. She tired of the puppy and sent him away very soon.

For so early in the afternoon the seats were fairly well filled, and it was nice to look down from the stage to the rows of lollipops

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all intent on us. In the more modern theatres in big Rep Domes, they have your music on a screen in front of your chair; here, we had to use printed music and turn our pages, but most of us were used to it, and I was full of happiness even before we began to make music. Although I'd had no practice for two months, I did not do badly. A couple of times when I came in late, Maria gave me an angry look, and the first violist, who was all of thirteen, stuck her tongue out at me.

Afterward, Maria invited me to dinner. We talked about music, about some of her own compositions, and about the new Block Poetry which was becoming popular. She advised me to spend an evening in the Spoken Arts, and take in some of the poetry readings while I was at it. "What better way to spend your leave?" she asked.

At the moment, I agreed with her, and as it turned out, I spent most of my leave in the park or in various theatres in the Rep Dome. At the end of the week, I packed up, put on my new uniform, and flew down to the Caribbean for my first assignment.

Looking straight up, I could see a little dark bird with rust-red on its breast, clinging to a banana and boring a hole through the peel. It worked hard, and once it had gotten through the peel it began to gorge on the ripening fruit. Most of the banana hands were encased in protective covers, but this one must have been overlooked.

It was early in the morning, and while I lay quite still and looked up into the banana tree, I could feel the night damp through my uniform.

Sgt. Krane was supposed to come up from Roseau to join me. A Cuba Dominion heli had dropped me off on the mountain road, and I'd gone into the plantation a certain distance, keeping out of sight. Here I was lying in wait, for far too long. I'd never met Sgt. Krane and wondered if the person was a woman or a man.

My stomach growled and I envied the bird his breakfast. The whole island was covered with growing fruits, but all I'd had was a thermo-pak of coffee.

Not being sure how the sergeant would arrive, I kept my ears open. There were bird calls, and a little breeze in the big banana leaves, but I never heard another sound until the foot came down on my throat. Not hard, just hard enough to pin me to the spot.

"Hallo," the person said.

I moved my eyes. Tall, with a thin, black, bony face. He wore pale nylon pants and a sleeveless shirt. In one hand he held an island cutlass.

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"Good morning," I croaked.

He gazed seriously down at me. The cutlass swung casually as his arm raised a little, then dropped back to his side.

"A nap?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Funny place for it. We have some nice hotels on the island. We don't often get tourists asleep in the middle of a plantation."

"You can see I'm not dressed as a tourist."

"Oh," he said, taking his foot from my throat. "We are seeing people in all kinds of costumes."

Yes, I thought, lying very still; some people have been showing up in Planet Patrol uniforms. That makes lots of trouble for everyone. I measured the distance from the ground to his cutlass hand, and let my muscles go lax, because he had a good eye and could tell if I was lying here all bunched up for a fight.

"You'd better come down to the house with me," he said.

"Whose house?"

"Mr. Marrant's. You're lying under one of his banana trees."

The cutlass had come to full rest. I doubled up like a closing jackknife to get both hands on his cutlass wrist, and kept going, head over heels, flinging him down behind me. I held on until his fingers released the hilt.

Holding the cutlass, I looked down at him. He lay so still I thought I'd damaged him. His eyes were closed. When he opened them I could see how angry he was—his eyes were sort of maroon and his upper lip pulled so tight it disappeared. "Damn neat," he said, but he didn't move.

"Please get up. We'll go down to Mr. Marrant's as soon as the sergeant arrives."

He got gingerly to his feet, rubbing his hip bone where he'd landed. "I think you're a real Patrol. I'm fifty-eight and no one has ever taken my cutlass from me."

One day I'd be fifty-eight and not so full of myself as I was now, and it seemed worth taking a chance. I turned the cutlass hilt first and offered it to him, saying, "I'm sorry, sir. But we're trained for just that kind of thing."

He looked down his nose at my offer. "No, Pippa," he said. "You took it. You keep it until your sergeant comes."

I sat down cross-legged with the cutlass on the ground in front of me, and after a moment, he sat down, too, opposite me. "You're a well-trained young woman," he said.

"Yes, sir. I have to be."

He looked up into the banana tree from which the bird had fled; he looked down at the soft ground where we sat. Sproutlets from old banana roots were up at various levels around us. A hot, dappled sunlight made patterns on our heads and knees.

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"The sergeant you wait for is also a woman," he remarked.

The cutlass lay between us on the ground, and I wondered if I should have made that noble gesture. "You have seen her," I said in the same offhand tone.

He looked into my eyes with such sharp intelligence I was sure no imposter could fool him. "At dawn I saw a woman in your blue Patrol uniform walk up into the mountain toward the Three Voices. That is some distance from here."

As far as I knew, Sgt. Krane and myself were the only Patrol members on the island at the time. Either the woman he'd seen was one of the counterfeits, or my sergeant was looking for me somewhere else.

"What are the Three Voices?" I asked.

"Where the waters come down. Our power station is there."

Water power? I was baffled. "Could you direct me there?"

"No," he said. "I could take you there."

In the ensuing silence I wondered if he wished for a bribe, or wanted to see my credentials, or was planning how to do away with me, or if he was merely as mystified as I.

"Tell me, how many of the fake Patrol people have you seen?"

"I have not seen one. I have heard that two men and a woman came in a small boat from the Atlantic side, claiming to be from our own Dominion. They disappeared into the interior," he jerked a thumb over his shoulder to the great mountains behind him, where the clouds were gathering for the daily rain. Three hundred or more inches per year drenched the mountain forests, although the coast had months of clear weather with only an afternoon shower now and then.

Leaving the cutlass on the ground, because I was unwilling to back out from my own foolhardiness, I stood up. "Will you take me to the Three Voices?"

Leaving the cutlass on the ground, with a glance of utter contempt from its blade to my face, he also got to his feet. "If you wish," he said.

I followed him down the slope, past the trunks of fruiting trees, and new ones rising from the old roots where last year's trees had been cut down after the crop was harvested. When we came to the road I saw a truck of a kind I didn't think still existed. It was powered by combustion; a monster mounted on huge nylon tires. Most of the paint looked as if it had been blasted off. The body was made of bare, splintery boards. He got in behind the wheel and I ran around the truck and got in beside him.

"My name's Roxy Rimidon," I said.

"Yes, Pippa," he answered, and

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put the truck noisily in gear. It must have had some kind of brakes, but we sailed down the curved road first on one slant and then on another. Now and then chunks of the old road broke off under the wheels and hit the underside of the cab with the sound of a gong. A couple of plantation autogyros flew over us during the ride. We passed through the center of a town, with its palm trees and flowering bromeliads in the central square, and the pale pink and orange houses, with their cool slatted walls, making a geometric print on the hillsides in the bright, hot air.

The road began to curve up again. We passed a similar vehicle on its way down, and both drivers honked a greeting. When we reached the top of the hill, my driver reached under the dashboard and pulled out a speaker in a tangled nest of wires; I never saw anything so unkempt, but it seemed to work.

He spoke patois, which I could not get, except "Patrol" which stuck out like a shout several times. In a few minutes, a heli, with the blue insignia of Cuba Dominion, flew into sight above some cocoa trees and then went on ahead of us, very low. The combined sounds of truck and heli were deafening.

Up one mountain, down the next, into a grey mist. Rain forest appeared around us. There wasn't an inch of bare ground, one plant grew on another; the great limbs of old trees bristled with air plants. Everything dripped and steamed, and I could have sworn I felt mildew in my boots. They were certainly full of sweat.

The heli had come down and was standing in a small, lush valley just below the electric power station with its strange poles and wires and insulators. Two councilmen in beige tropic shorts and shirts were waiting.

"Here she is," my driver said as I got out. "She wants to go up to the Three Voices. She is looking, perhaps, for another Patrol woman."

The two dark men were stiff backed and polite, but nothing more. They turned, and began to climb a steep trail and I followed, hearing the truck roar away behind us.

The trail was rough, jumbled with damp stones, slippery with moss, and soon, almost vertical. There was a dull thunder which increased as we climbed. I began to get that depressed and ominous feeling one gets from subsonics, or the approach of doom, and wondered if just this thundering vibration accounted for it.

Sweat and moisture poured down from my scalp and face, my uniform drenched, the leather of my boots scraped, and stained with moss. The air was so moist it was like breathing through a

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sponge. The thunder grew so loud it was rumbling and roaring in my chest. The trail took a sharp turn between boulders, and we stood under tremendous cliffs.

I looked up hundreds of feet to where the water began its fall. It came down in three separate places to a foaming, boulder filled pool below us. In the pool, belly up, floated a dead woman in a blue Patrol uniform.

My two companions simply stood looking at her. I went down carefully to the water, where I took off my boots and waded in. The great torrents roared down and a cool mist blew across my face. I caught the body by one leg and pulled it back toward the edge, got an arm under the hips and lifted her out. She flopped wetly, one arm hanging into a crevice. Her cap was missing, but papers in her pocket were orders addressed to Sgt. Ann Krane. When I looked up, the councilmen were watching me suspiciously.

"Ever seen her before?" I asked.

"No," the younger man said. "Never. Is she real Planet Patrol?"

Of course what he meant was: are you real Planet Patrol?

"I'm not sure. Give me a moment more." I pulled her shirttails out of the pantaloons and looked for the featherweight belt at her waist. Strapped to it was standard equipment, including the little container of hormone tabs, and a tiny watertight pouch which held a metal match. Hooked into the breast pocket of her jacket was a steel tube no bigger than a match. I'd never seen one before and took it out to examine it. Something appeared to be inside. I tried to get it apart, but nothing budged. I put my thumbnail into a hairline crack, and for my trouble I got two blue sparks.

If it was a signaling device, which I thought it must be, I had just sent a message. Standing there I listened to the enormous thunder, saw that awesome sight of water pouring down from the tremendous cliffs, and wondered who, or what, might appear in response.

If the corpse was not Sgt. Krane, then she was still around somewhere and I'd better find her.

The older councilman said, "Shall we carry her back?"

"I imagine in a couple of weeks there'll be nothing left but a few bones, which will hardly disturb the ecology," I said angrily.

They came down together, picked her up, and began to cart her off down the slippery trail. I hoped she was not my partner, for I didn't feel like going it alone, and felt even less like reporting the murder of a Planet Patrol auxiliary.

The Roseau Council had called for Planet Patrol assistance when the counterfeit Patrol people had appeared, then vanished so suspi-

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ciously. At that same time, the young growth from banana roots, wrapped in island soil and packed in life-support crates for shipment to Vogl, had been found destroyed at the airport warehouse. The climate on much of Vogl, though wetter, was similar to that of the Cuba Dominion areas where bananas grew. Because Vogl was our great agricultural triumph, with fast-growing colonies on the waterways and in wet forests, one shipment of new banana trees was to be exported every month for a year.

No one was sure yet how they would take the trip, how they would survive on such a planet, or even at what stage of growth it was best to ship them, but hope of success had been very high. The first shipment was totally destroyed before it even left the island.

We were halfway down the trail, the two men with their dead, wet burden ahead of me, when I heard a small heli coming across from the north of the island. I thought of the signal I must have sent, and called out to them, "Let's get under cover."

We twisted off the path, stumbling among huge roots. My boots slipped in the juice of torn leaves. When I glanced back, before the solid screen of growth could obscure my view, I saw that the man had dropped the body on the trail. Damn fools, to leave it out there in plain view. I kept bulling my way through vines, got cracked across the brow by a branch, and wondered if there were many poisonous insects about. The heli came on over the tops of the trees. There was the sound of the triple vanes, the high whine of a beam from a Clam gun, and the backwash of scorching air from where it had hit.

When the sound of the heli grew faint, I began to crawl back toward the path. Where the body had lain, there was a little pile of black ash, with a few wisps of smoke still rising sluggishly in the moist air.

What interested me was the view they may have had from the heli. Did they see only a blue Patrol uniform on a woman, and burn it, or did they know who the woman was? If they held Sgt. Krane, and assumed they had just burned me, the best I could do was get out of uniform and blend into the background. Blending into the background would be a chore; big, blonde, and fair-skinned, I was one out of three or four such women on the whole island.

The two councilmen crawled out to join me. "My God," the young one said.

"A Clam gun," the older one said. "They ought to be banned. Not even Patrol should use them."

Except on special duty, no Patrol member carries a weapon. I looked sharply at the gasgun on his

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hip, the effective weapon councilmen wore at all times, and he looked away quickly.

Walking onto the trail, I kicked and scattered the pile of ash until nothing could be seen but bootmarks. Taking the lead, I went down, slipping over the wet rocks, with the two men behind me.

They took me to the council office where I should have been able to speak with the council president, but he was off on his boat with some friends.

I left his office, and walked through the old part of town to the more modern area where the hotel was. It had been built recently and was very pleasant, a series of one-room units facing the hot blue Caribbean. The ceilings were high; a band of slat ventilators ran around them at the top. The slats on the sunny side automatically closed when the temperature rose, while those on the shady side opened. Like most of the island buildings, the wall facing the sea was all slatted so that the room could be entirely opened to the sea if the tenant chose. During the rains, and months of high humidity, a switch locked the slats shut and turned on a cooler.

Although it was warm at noon, the humidity was low, so I lay down for a comfortable nap, chuckled to sleep by some bird outside my room in a sweetsop tree. When I woke, it was midafternoon, and the clouds, which always stretched out like Mercator projections at the edge of the sea, were beginning to mass in long horizontals. I had time for a swim. The lava sand, brilliant with grains of silica, was fiery hot, and I ran fast across it to plunge into the water.

When I came out I saw a figure standing in the shade of a cocoa palm. With my feet cool and wet, the return trip over the blazing sand was not as bad. There stood my cutlass-carrying friend of the morning, in a white suit with a bright green scarf at his neck, looking cool in all senses of the word.

"Mr. Marrant would like you to come to his house," he said.

"I must go to the council office this afternoon."

"It is pleasant here on our island, isn't it?" he said, and gave a look at my dripping self, fresh from a swim like a tourist. I could understand that he thought I should be on the job rather than enjoying myself. He went on, "Mr. Marrant has asked you for dinner."

Very good, I thought, because it would give me a place to start. For all I knew, he was harboring Vogl malcontents, an extreme group of the Independents who thought they needed no connection with Earth any more.

"I will call for you at eight," he said.

I thought of the new kyrene dress I'd brought down, and asked in a scandalized voice, "In that truck?"

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"No, Pippa, in Mr. Marrant's helicar."

"What's your name?" I asked.

"San' Clement," he said, and turned away, adding something in patois, from which the word "Pippa" burst out with a kind of laugh.

The council president was in his office, a fat man with shrewd eyes and agreeable smile, Ian Toxetl. "Naturally, we think it must be members of the Vogl Independents, who else would do such a thing?" he asked. "Though it is stupid. If they want to be independent and carry on free trade, which they must do for years to come, why wouldn't they welcome a new crop to grow? That is what puzzles us so much. And it's common knowledge that if the banana shipments are successful, next year we'll try cocoa, and perhaps guava too. There are so few native Vogl crops which are edible, they should welcome these shipments."

"If they're fanatics, like that extreme insurrectionist group, there'd be no limit to what they'd try. There's been so much loud talk about the ship space used for food animals or agricultural equipment, and not enough space for people to travel—"

He interrupted me, saying mildly, "But Vogl is an agricultural planet, which the first settlers understood."

"Yes, sir, but here's a second generation. By now, lots of Vogl families would like to send students to our universities. They resent the exclusion of their young people from our Planet Patrol Academies, and the necessity for calling us from Earth to come shoot their troubles for them. Not to mention the exclusion from competition in Games. Though next year they'll be coming in for the first time, for Games."

Mr. Toxetl picked up the carafe from his desk and poured a red drink into two glasses. Ice tinkled in the carafe, and the glasses frosted over. It looked delicious and suspicious. I accepted my drink and sipped it. Sweet and tart, with a faint flavor of nutmeg, and after the sip was swallowed, the small fire of a good rum began to burn.

"This is what you might call a small-town island," he said thoughtfully. "We're happy here, we rarely need to call Patrol for anything. Most of us were delighted to help send banana stock out for experimental growth on Vogl—made us feel we had some part in human progress. You must be aware that the whole shipment was donated by various growers."

"It must make you feel even more bitter about its destruction, then. Just at the moment, though, I'm most concerned with the dead woman. With her identity. If she wasn't Sergeant Krane, I must find out who she was, and where Krane is now."

"Do you want to call your head-

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quarters? We have rather primitive equipment, just the undersea cable, but we can make contact for you—the radiophone is always busy and hardly private."

"If you please. Then we can get on with the job you called us for."

He offered to refill my glass, but I moved it away. "No, thanks, sir, though it's very good."

"Ah, yes, you're from the North," he said whimsically. "I've been there several times. No one drinks in the office. Am I right?"

I couldn't help laughing. "Just about, sir. It's only a matter of local custom."

"So it is," he agreed, and refilled his own glass. Then he turned to the switchboard behind him and began putting through a call. I guessed it would take some time, with such equipment.

In half an hour, I'd made my report, and received instructions to proceed on my own, which is just what I knew they'd tell me. They also gave me the information that two livestock freighters had been impounded at the Vogl spaceport, their crews held as "guests" while Vogl flight engineers and other specialists were taking over. It wasn't yet known whether this was the work of the rapidly growing Independent group, or of some more extreme faction.

"The waterfalls," I said to Mr. Toxetl. "That's a very impressive place."

"Yes, it is, Pippa. Perhaps now that you've seen it, you'll understand why we've resisted the nuclear stations for so long, in spite of being called backward."

"But the nuclear station needn't be put there, sir. It could better be on the coast, or anywhere you please."

He spread his hands. In this century of total mobility, pride of place was a rare thing, but I thought the people of this island felt it strongly. Mr. Toxetl said, "Some of us still believe the Three Voices are meant to supply us with power. A sort of arrangement between those whose great-grandparents were born here, and the spirit they believed inhabits the place of the falls."

Having been in the power of that spirit so recently, I knew what he meant. It was not just electricity generated there by that thundering downpour, but something more, intangible though it might be. Once the nuclear station was established, and the power drawn from elsewhere, that part of the interior would be deserted, and the spiritual strength no longer met, and matched, by man.

I went back to my hotel. The tiny patios in front of each unit were filling up with tourists, sipping bright drinks, or eating fruit served in long scoops. One of the scoops had been put on the table on my patio, filled with limes, bananas, and mangoes. A small, dark bird similar to the one I'd seen

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this morning was drilling a hole through the mango skin. I stood to watch him. He made a fine meal, and wobbled off after he'd stuffed himself. I cleaned out the well he'd drilled in to the mango and ate the rest of the fruit before it could spoil.

After I put on the kyrene dress, which was a changeable red, running through dark orange to scarlet to shades of rose and lavender, I showed off my sophistication by putting in a ruby nose stud. It was uncomfortable, but everyone was wearing them. What bothered me most about it was that in artificial light I kept getting red gleams and flashes from the end of my own nose, and sometimes found myself looking cross-eyed.

San' Clement put the heli down on the hotel lawn at eight o'clock, when the sun was setting over the Caribbean in gorgeous splashes of color. The clouds had turned black and were piling up, though they held no storm as they would have in the North. We lifted up and flew along the coast as the light faded.

San' Clement didn't seem hostile, but he was silent, and during the ride I kept feeling he had to struggle to keep quiet. This conflict he had with himself did nothing to make me feel more secure. He set the heli down on the gentle slope in front of Marrant's house of orange and white slats, with the lamplight shining in stripes across the front of it. He left me at the front door, and vanished into the night.

The door was opened by a small man, a few inches shorter than I. He had amber-colored skin and pure white hair, though he looked no more than thirty-five. "A Pippa!" he said, laughing.

He held the door wide and beckoned me in. I followed him into the big front room opening toward the sea, which was black now, with only a few faint boat lights showing as if they were stars drifting loose in space. Two men and a woman, all casually dressed in light clothing, were sitting around with drinks. They went on chatting as we came in, though the woman looked up at me for a quick assessment. The two men were pale and thin, with that soft, porous look produced by years in a steamy hot climate.

On the coffee table lay the blue cap of Planet Patrol auxiliary. The three silver chevrons on the side of the cap shone in the lamplight. Wherever my sergeant was, she had lost her cap. So had the body in the pool. A moment of outrage and disgust made me speechless.

Then I picked up the cap, and turned it over in my hands.

Marrant said, "One of my men found it this morning."

The woman put her drink down and sat back in her chair, examining my face, my nose stud, with considerable interest. She was

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about twenty-four and pretty, suntanned, and in good shape like an athlete.

Nothing was said, so I asked, "Who saw the woman in Patrol uniform go up toward the Three Voices?"

"I did," Marrant answered. "San' Clement was driving me down from a neighbor near there, and we saw her. I knew Planet Patrol had been called in, and was glad to see you were on the job, provided she was not one of the people we suspect to be imposters. Isn't it a mystery?" He cocked his sharp white head on one side and looked expectantly at me.

I could feel eggshells crackling under my feet; it was no time to be clumsy. I sat down beside the other woman, and Marrant brought me a drink. It was the same red one Ian Toxetl had given me, but much stronger.

A flash of ruby from my nose made me turn my head slightly, and I had another good look at the woman next to me. Something about the way she sat, the way her clothes fitted her, made me think of Games athletes, who were in perpetual training, and of the Vogl athletes who were already coming in to Earth to train for the next Games. "You're from Vogl."

She picked up her drink and swallowed a mouthful of it. "Yes. I'm a runner. I'll be at the Games, when we're allowed in, at long last. I came here to train."

It could be the truth. There was hardly any land on Vogl which was not bog, swamp, water, or wet forest; no good place for a distance runner to train, though some of them managed. "Long distance?" I asked her.

"No. One hundred meters," she said. I knew she was lying. She had the long, slim muscles of a dancer, not the sinewy ropes of a high-speed sprinter.

"I'm Roxy Rimidon," I said, and extended my hand to her. She flinched from me, and to cover it, picked up her drink and finished it off. Sgt. Krane's cap was on my knee. I picked it up and folded it flat. "I'll return it to her family," I said. With a deep breath, I plunged in. "You don't by any chance have her ID? She wasn't wearing it."

It ran through my mind that last year's proposal to tattoo a Planet Patrol member's ID number on the inside of the thigh was a reasonable suggestion, even though a total revolt of Patrol members had blown the idea to a powder.

After a shock of hesitation from all of them, except Marrant who gave a cold smile, one of the pale men reached into his pocket and brought out the tag, which he tossed to me. I put it inside the folded cap, and continued to sit there and take little sips of my drink. There were sounds of activity from the kitchen, so I supposed we were going to eat soon. Wheth-

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er I'd be fed before slaughter was something I'd just have to wait to find out. Meanwhile, I looked around the room.

There was no other door than the one we'd come in by. The slats at the front of the house were sturdy, though I could probably go through them by getting a fast start and using all my weight. Of course no one in the room was going to sit around while I made a hole in Marrant's front wall and escaped.

Marrant was sitting on a formidable lounge in the middle of the room. It was made of white nylon zig-zagged all over with such brilliant turquoise that it was uncomfortable to look at. He sat like a doll, dead-center of the lightning design, still wearing the cold smile.

I asked him, "How did you get her up to the falls, when she was supposed to meet me miles away?"

"It wasn't hard. I pulled over to her on the road to my plantation and said I'd seen a Planet Patrol auxiliary going up toward the falls. She took the bait like a shark."

I gritted my teeth in disgust. Then I said, "Do you want to tell me what it's about, or shall I just guess?"

"We'd like your cooperation," Marrant said. "I hope you won't be as stubborn as the sergeant. Actually, she was the victim of an accident; we'd much prefer to have her alive and helpful. What kind of training do you auxiliaries get, anyway?"

"Tough," I said. "Long, hard, tough training, and only about forty percent of the Academy students make it. Since we are only allowed to carry weapons on special duty, each individual must consider her whole self a form of weapon. As you must have found out."

Marrant chuckled. "We did, all right. I've one man with broken ribs and another opened up from shoulder to hip with his own knife. As I said, her death was an accident. She was simply uncontainable."

"It was wrong," the woman next to me suddenly said, in a blazing rage. "There was no excuse for killing her."

"She was a good Patrol woman," I said, which was all the epitaph Sgt. Ann Krane would have.

"And you?" the woman suddenly asked, leaning forward. "I hate killing, but it doesn't mean I can't hate you."

"Try me," I told her, and she was halfway out of her chair when Marrant yelled, "Reba, sit down."

She did what he told her. I asked Marrant, "What do you get out of this complicity?"

"Oh, I have some acreage on Vogl."

It made no sense at all to me, Vogl acreage being worth only what you could grow on it, and here he owned a big plantation.

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Again I turned to the woman, and I asked, "Are you really a runner?"

"No. I'm one of the Vogl Patrol. We're opening our own Academies. Why should we try to enter yours? We don't need Earth Planet Patrol, half of you fall into our bogs and have to be rescued. We'll have our own, and do a better job. But I don't believe in murder. Your sergeant would still be alive if I'd been in charge."

She looked so murderous I wasn't sure I could believe that. Yet, if she were working with this group and could openly defy them this way, in front of me, she must mean what she said, if only in theory.

Though I had no use for the methods used by these extremists, like many Earth people I did sympathize with the Vogl Independents who wanted their own Planet Patrol. There was no reason they should not have it, and in fact most of us knew it was planned for the future. The Earth Planet Patrol Academies had been established for fifty years, and during that time the best methods of training, mental and physical, had been worked out. Staff must have several years of active duty behind them, and the regulations were tougher on staff than on students; the rule was a good one: don't teach what you don't know or can't do.

The plan on Earth books called for Academy instructors to be sent to Vogl within the next five or six years, when it was expected the ships would have a new drive, making it faster and cheaper to send live cargo back and forth. The instructors would establish Academies in two or three Vogl cities, and train qualified Vogl-born people to staff them.

"Well," I said. "What has all this to do with bananas?"

Marrant got up. He went to a table against the wall, and lifted from it one of the common fruit-scoops. It held what looked like a fruit, large, egg-shaped, with a bluish rind. At one end, a few blue-green fibers sprouted from it. Marrant brought the dish across to me, put it on the table, and began to peel off the bluish rind with a small knife. The pulp was rosy gold. It had a heady fragrance and my mouth watered. I took the fruit and sat looking at it, remembering the Academy sergeant who had said to me: "Your appetite will be the death of you one day."

Today, perhaps? Reba took the fruit from my hand and bit out a large mouthful, chewed it slowly, and swallowed. Then she handed it back to me. "That's a reem, native to Vogl. It grows under the same conditions as bananas, and we can't see any reason for growing bananas, which you have plenty of, when we can grow reems, and export them to you for a lovely high price. Taste it, and you'll see."

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I took a bite. It was excellent, sweet as flute music, with the juice like a cool cascade running into the corners of my mouth. I was very hungry, especially since the smell of calalou soup had started to drift out from the kitchen. It took some self-control to put the rest of the uneaten fruit down.

"Do you mean to say you haven't discussed this openly with anyone?" I asked.

Marrant replied, "Sure we have. We, or I should say they, for I'm Earth born no matter where my sympathies lie, were told that Earth would be delighted to make a fair trade. So many crates of bananas for so many crates of reems. And then someone got the brilliant idea of shipping out young banana stock so Vogl could grow bananas for themselves and for export, and doesn't that take care of the value of a crate of reems? And reems, by the way, do not flourish here. I have tried them in my own plantation."

Reba added, "And bananas don't travel well. Not like reems. That rind protects them from bruises, and extremes of hot and cold. They're cheaper to ship, easier to harvest, and what's more, we've got all of them, and you don't have any."

"It seems to me this is a matter for the Trade Councils," I said. "Why impersonate Patrol members, commit murder, destroy a whole shipment of fruit stock? You can't expect us to do business with you now."

One of the thin men said, "You've got hundreds of different people and areas growing bananas. The reem crop is in the control of the Independents, and we're in the process of getting it away from them. We'll use it as a political weapon. The Independents have already tried talking fair, and nobody listens."

At that moment, the door from the kitchen opened and a woman said, "Dinner's ready."

Without a glance at me, everyone got up and moved to the table. Marrant stood behind a chair and gestured me over, so I went, and was seated with them. Marrant poured wine into our glasses, the calalou soup was served, and we began to eat. I felt I was sitting with a flock of the banana birds, the spoilers, a gulp here and a bite there, ruining a crop for everyone just to fill their own stomachs. Yet I didn't feel that about Reba, even though she hated me. Of the whole group, she was the only one who seemed to have the genuine motive of wanting to help the people of her home planet.

"If you'd only left Sergeant Krane alone," I said all of sudden, surprising myself. "What the hell do you expect from me now, after you've killed her."

Reba said, "I had nothing to do with that, I would have stopped it if I'd been there. I didn't want her

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killed. We had useful plans for her. Now we'll use you, instead. Even if you don't decide to help us, and I can see you won't. We'll open up your brain with one of our gadgets, and find just what we need for Pippa training."

Every element of my training was still fresh in my mind. If they had one of the pattern-transfer units—and I was sure they did have one—they could lift it all from my head while I lay unprotesting. It would leave part of my brain blank, and since I was too old for retraining, when I wakened I'd have to find some easy and undemanding job.

"We'd prefer you to help us willingly," one of the men said. The two of them were like twins, thin, pale, with even, soft features. "You'd get the best accommodations, a high rank, and be titular head of the first Vogl Patrol Academy. Not to mention," he smiled and showed sharp, greenish teeth, "many of our farmers would be glad to husband you. In real style."

"Thanks," I said. "If there's anything I like to choose for myself, it's a man." I finished the last spoonful of soup and added, "I suppose your graduates will be known as Vapors."

"Vappas," the man corrected me, with no show of temper.

"And you can't wait a few years for this to come about peacefully, with cooperation between both planets?" I asked.

Reba said passionately, "Don't you think some of us are sick of being farmers? After all, farming has been forced on us for two generations. We've got lots of bright youngsters who want to be radio astronomers, or surgeons, or a lot of things, and very few get the chance. Most of them are packed off to Aggie school and spend their lives tending hybrid goats or tanks of fish eggs. You want to choose a man for yourself, didn't you choose your own job, too?"

Yes, it was a valid argument, and no, they were doing it the worst way possible and would bring nothing but disaster to Vogl. I helped myself from the platter of fried iguana. Marrant went around the table refilling our wine glasses. When he came to my side, he put his hand on my shoulder, and said, "At least think it over. We can use you, and we can offer you a good deal in exchange. If you stay here, you'll never make a high rank before you retire. And don't worry, you can pick your own man, or a dozen of them. The Vogl boys are healthy and good looking."

"More agriculture," I said, pushing away my plate. "Now you're offering me stud service."

Reba threw her wine into my face, and I kicked my chair backward as I got out of it, not without a regret for my kyrene dress which had cost me a month's credit and had never been worn before.

She was as strong as I in her

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wiry way, though I had ten pounds on her. She had long hair, while my blonde waves had been cut very short before coming down to the tropics, so it didn't give her much to grab hold of. Her training was not as good as mine, but she made up for it with her speed. The skirt of my dress went first, got tangled around my ankles and took me down, while she jumped at me with both feet. I rolled out from under just in time; we grappled on the floor for a moment before separating and getting up again. I was satisfied to see I'd ruined her dress, too. The bodice hung in tatters around her waist. I bent, and made a feint for her legs, coming up with my shoulder under her chin, and heard her teeth crack together. She spat out blood.

In another moment, we'd stripped each other down to loin pants, and were sweating so we were slippery as eels. She was wearing hard sandals and had a tremendous kick; twice she nearly got me in the face with one heel, but the second time I grabbed hold while her leg was in the air, and she went over backward onto the white and turquoise lounge. I heard a crack as the arm of the lounge gave way, and another crack as I landed full force on her.

Someone pulled me back with incredible strength and held me with a knife at my throat, while the two pale men gripped Reba and held her still. "Damn you," Marrant said into my ear. "I had that lounge shipped from Scandia Dominion and you've ruined it."

My laugh was just a gurgle.

"God, you're conceited," Reba said to him scornfully. "No wonder they found you easy."

"Shut up," one of the men said to her. "He's worked hard and we need him."

"Will you stop fighting?" Marrant said to me.

"If she will."

He released me cautiously. The rags of our clothing lay on the floor and my ruby nose stud was gone, leaving the nostril sore. I looked under my lids at those slats open toward the sea. There hadn't been a sound from outside since I got out of the heli, and it must still be parked out there. It wasn't going to be much fun going headfirst through the front of the house, if San' Clement was guarding the heli, where would I go, in nothing but loin pants?

I twisted away from Marrant, and began to stroll around the room, rubbing spots on my arms and shoulders which hurt. I came to a stop a little to the left, where the slat frame did not cross, and it might be easier to break through. Because I knew I had to get out.

"Here," one of the men said, and tossed his jacket to me. I let it fall to the floor.

"Thanks," I said, "but it's warm."

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Marrant eyed me. "Pippa," he said, "if they build them all like you at the Academies, Vogl will have to go some to match you."

I looked sideways at him, as though the compliment had pleased me, and I shifted my weight as though to show myself off. Then I took off from a standing start, headfirst with my shoulders hunched up high. At the last instant I turned my right shoulder to take the brunt of the slats. They gave with a shriek and splintering, and I was upon my feet again and running down the grass toward the shadowy mass of the heli, praying that San' Clement had gone home.

There was the hiss of a gasgun, and the harder sound of some hand weapon, as I ran in front of the heli to get around to the driver's side. The door was open, and as I put my foot on the step, a thin, cold hand, black as the night, took my arm and pulled me up and inside.

I fell across San' Clement's knees as the engine protested, groaned, and was revved up to top speed without mercy. We went straight up, before he worked it into its high speed, going down the coast toward Roseau.

I wriggled over to the other side of the seat. My shoulder hurt and was bloody, and in the night air blowing through the vents my skin chilled quickly. I looked over at San' Clement, but he said nothing.

"Were you waiting for me?" I asked.

"They have another heli. With a Clam gun," San' Clement said. "We have only a little start. Where shall I put you down?"

"Can you get me near the council office?"

"I will try." He was quiet again, and then as the lights of Roseau showed in the distance on the coast, he said, "I worked all my life for Marrant. I'm his foreman."

"Now you're out of a job. What will you do?"

"I have a house, and a few cocoa trees. Four sons and four grandchildren. I am not so bad. If we make it to Roseau."

The lights of the second heli were visible behind us. "Has it got more power than this one?" I asked.

"No. But it has the Clam gun, which they used this morning, you know, to dispose of the sergeant in case the drowning was not enough. The woman was very angry."

"She's still angry," I said. "Do you have a transmitter?"

"It is fixed to send and receive only on their wave."

"How far are we now from Roseau?"

"Half a mile, maybe. Look down. You can see it is cleared."

"Then put us down and I'll run for it, and you get under cover. They will follow me, not you."

"You cannot outrun them for half a mile, Pippa."

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"I can try," I said.

I saw his teeth shine as he smiled. "Oh, that is good. From the only one who could take my cutlass from me. No one can outrun a Clam gun."

"But they can't afford to burn the town. Put us down, San' Clement, and you take cover. I'll make it somehow."

We started going down. On his side of the seat, San' Clement was going through some vigorous contortions, getting out of his white jacket, and then out of the dark shirt he wore under it. He tossed me the shirt. "Wear it, you show up like a fish belly," he said.

He put the heli down near a group of large, flat-topped trees. The other heli was already coming down after us. We tumbled out. I ran, not toward the trees, which they'd expect me to head for, but across open ground, guessing I wasn't yet in range of their gun. It was a close guess. As I turned into the first street, the Clam gun burst open the ground only a few feet behind me. At least San' Clement had a chance to get out of the way.

The first fence was low and gave me no trouble; then there was a series of them, as I cut along behind the houses, and several of them were high fences with no foothold, which slowed me down. I had tied the ends of San' Clement's shirt around my waist and was unhappily aware of the white flash of my legs going over the tops of fences. The heli was cruising not far away, and they probably had a light which they could use to spot me, if they dared use it right over town.

They dared. They put the spot on, and it made a light like white noon over a fifteen foot area. It began to swing slowly across the grounds in back of the houses, coming closer to where I was. I was at the rear door of a small home; inside, there was music, and people were talking. As the light charged toward my heels, I walked into their kitchen, and right through. The music went on, though the voices stopped dead. I made it to the front door when someone came out of his shock and yelled, and threw a bottle after me. It grazed the back of my neck as I plunged out the front door into the street, ran across and between two houses on the other side.

The swath of light crossed the street just after me, and then swooped back and circled over the house I'd left. When I got into the next street, I looked back, saw the heli low over the roof and someone climbing down the ladder that hung from it into the back yard.

I hit the center of town at a dead run. Startled groups of people dispersed as I came along, heading for the council office. Many of them called after me, but in patois, and there was nothing they could do anyhow. I hoped Toxetl was in.

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He was tilted back in his chair taking a snooze when I burst in. At first he had no idea who I was and looked bewildered, then he said, "You're some sight. What has happened?"

"Get me that line through to headquarters, and I'll tell you, or you can listen in," I said. "And I'd like one of those red drinks, I'm so thirsty."

He gestured to the carafe on his desk and I helped myself. His two councilmen ran into the office and skidded to a stop, one on each side of me. Toxetl made a motion which backed them off, and they stood guard on each side of the door.

"Just the two of you in Roseau?" I asked.

"We're enough," the younger one said.

When Toxetl sat back in his chair, waiting for the connection to go through, I gave him the story, tightly condensed. He sent the councilmen out after the man who'd come down from the heli, and they ran out with their gas-guns drawn which was enough to alarm everyone in town. "Well, you've had a day," Mr. Toxetl said comfortably. "Why don't you sit down?"

"Got the fidgets, sir, until I make my report, and get this finished. I can't stand to have those people loose. Though no matter what you think, I'd put in a word for the woman Reba. She wasn't responsible for Sergeant Krane's death. And if they're going to have their own Academies, they'll need women like her. Marrant's your charge, I guess."

He lowered his lids, dropped his chin on his chest, and spread out his hands. "Yes, Council will take care of him. They can't get far in such a small heli, only over to another island, or so." He put through a radio call to the office on the Cuba Dominion mainland.

By the time my connection to headquarters came through, the two councilmen were back, with one of the Vogl men between them. He was missing a front tooth.

I was in the middle of my report, having covered the bananas versus reems, and the possibility of leaving Reba out out of it all, when a light started to flash on the board. Mr. Toxetl reached over my shoulder to take out one of the plugs, and when I moved to get out of his way, I also took out the plug in front of me. I'd never seen this kind of communicator, but from the look on his face, I'd done something wrong.

He took his call, saying nothing, and replaced the plug in its socket. He said, "The heli ran out of fuel just short of the next island. The occupants were picked up by a council boat alive and kicking. Whom were you talking to, Pippa?"

"Colonel Cohen," I said.

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"Poor Colonel Cohen," Mr. Toxetl murmured. "Bet he never had a Pippa hang up on him before."

"Is that what I did?"

A light was flashing rapidly on the board. Mr. Toxetl moved the plug and took the speaker from me. "Yes," he said into it. "Yes, we've had a lot of trouble on this line, Colonel. Pippa Rimidon's already scolded me for it. Here she is," and he winked at me, and returned the speaker so I could complete my report.

When I'd finished my drink, the younger councilman gave me a ride to my hotel. I was glad to get into the cool, breezy room, and wash the blood from the cuts on my shoulder. It was badly bruised, turning black and yellow, but nothing worse. I'd bled all over San' Clement's shirt, so I washed that out and hung it to dry. Then I turned in and fell asleep between two breaths.

In the morning I ate breakfast on the patio. The little banana bird was there, perched on the back of a lounge. I pushed my plate to his edge of the table, with a slice of banana on it, and watched him hop over. Standing on the rim of the plate, he pecked rapidly at the fruit, now and then giving me a smart look from one eye or the other.

Dressed, with my kit packed, I stopped off at the council office for San' Clement's address. The older of the councilmen gave me a ride to the edge of town, where he dropped me off into the care of his cousin, who had a scooter car. The cousin gave me a long ride and passed me on to his brother-in-law who had one of the old trucks. Little by little I went back into the interior, up through the hills of banana and cocoa plantations, into the misty mountains where the daily rain clouds were gathering.

San' Clement lived in a white and blue house, with a garden of bromeliads surrounding it with orange and red blossoms. The air was full of wet mist and in the near distance a thunderous roar sounded. I took his folded, clean shirt from my kit and carried it up to the door, which San' Clement opened.

"Good morning, sir," I said. "Thanks for the loan of your shirt."

His wife came out and looked at me wide-eyed. "You are young," she said in amazement.

I looked over the roof of their house, towards the towering mountain tops. The Three Voices were over there, and San' Clement lived enclosed within the constant rumble and thunder.

He said, "Yes, the waters come down just over there in back of us. You're welcome for the shirt."

"I wanted to say good-bye, and thanks for your help."

He smiled slightly and turned his head a bit. I knew he was

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Robin Carson has published a number of novels of his own and has also translated from the Italian. His first story for F&SF is an absorbing and surprising tale about a hunter who longs for a bit of magic to overcome his uncanny run of bad luck, and what happens when he gets it.

HUNTING

by Robin Carson

THE MOMENT THE SUN SANK behind the upper ridge the air turned markedly colder, as if its last slanting rays had snapped the switch on a thermostat. The man sitting on the stone moved his shoulders up and down inside his clothes to bring back a sense of warmth. A drop began to form at the tip of his nose from the cold. "A while longer," he thought, "then, if nothing shows, I'll call it a day."

With deliberate slowness, to fill the chill tedium of waiting, he fished out a piece of tissue from a pocket and with as little sound as the act permitted blew his nose. The balled-up wad fell to the ground, white and alien against the soft wood colors. Around it several cigarette stubs, sandwich wrappers, and the tinfoil of a chocolate bar formed an uneven circle, like the broken face of a clock without hands. The man's eyes never left the slope he was watching.

As a setting it couldn't have been better. The seat he had chosen lay against an incline of dark hemlocks, and while commanding a free view of a sloping glen of ash and beech saplings with a sampling of oaks thrown in to supply a lure of acorns, it was lightly screened by a line of brambles. One knew immediately

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that this was the kind of spot where deer liked to hang out. Their tracks crisscrossed the yellowed bracken, and their rich spillings shone like small black olives among the brown velvet of moss and dead leaves. It was a honey of a spot. For additional guaranty, the bark on several saplings was worn off from the bucks polishing their horns there. A honey of a spot, no doubt about it. The only wrong feature was that it had occurred to no deer to come near the place since the man had taken up position there.

Now, as he slid down from his unrewarding lookout he softly cursed the deer for their animal perversity. He had been out in the mountain since daybreak without seeing a single deer.

Not a glimpse of one. And that in spite of having felt more than usually confident that this would be the day he brought down his buck. A half-moon was still high in the sky and daybreak but a faint streak on the horizon when he set out, for he wanted to be well up in the mountain by daylight and when the deer started on their upward trek from the lower flats where they spent the night. He'd be up there to meet them. Sun-up found him ready and alert on the broad grassy shelf just below the upper ridge. From further down and along the stretches of the mountain the first shots of the day rang out. So much the better. They'd be driving the deer up and over this way. Already the frost-crackly bracken was softening underfoot from the sidling rays of the sun. A perfect morning for stalking. Perfect. And didn't even his name, his own name mean deer? Hart, Norman Hart. As he often had when out hunting, he again mused over the meaning of his name. Way back in time it probably had contained some specific allusion, way back when people believed in magic. Then when they ceased to believe in it, magic lost its power. Too bad, in a way. He could have used some of it. Often enough.

A rustle among the dead leaves ahead brought him to a sharp stop. Breath bated, he slid the gun out of the crook of his arm, listening as he scanned the sparse undergrowth. It turned out to have been two squirrels chasing one another through the dry leaves. Still, with all the natural attributes of the mountain overwhelmingly in favor of the deer, a buck could be standing right there in the clump of saplings and be virtually invisible so long as he didn't move. It happened to Hart more than once in the past that he had flushed deer out of the undergrowth without a chance of a shot before they disappeared among the trees. Of course, some hunters would open up on anything that moved, and look later to see what they had brought down. To that category

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Norman Hart did not belong. As he was wont to say, "I want my buck as much as the next man, but I've got to see the horns before I shoot. I'll take it fair."

That kind of talk always went over well where hunters met and the talk was on deer. Which it always was. Then, no matter what eager beavers they were when alone and out on the mountain, they were all careful and conscientious hunters, respecting the rules, careful about aim, and who'd rather not fire a shot than hit a doe. The difference with Norman Hart was that on that subject he spoke the factual truth, omitting only one detail, that he never had shot a deer in any manner, fair or foul.

If sometimes he appeared sad, or his eyes seemed to hide a secret sorrow, that, more likely than not, was the reason, that he had never, for all the years he had gone hunting, come back with a deer. It had become a double tradition, every year taking off from the office the first week of the deer season, and returning without having shot a deer. It was, truly, uncanny, considering that he was a good enough shot, at target practice, and that the section of mountains he frequented teemed with deer. None the less, while other cars he passed on his way back every year carried carcasses of deer, proudly slung over the hood, he traditionally came back empty handed. Among his friends in the office his lack of prowess as a hunter had become a mild joke, and he had to bear now and then to be called the Deer Slayer. But it was all harmless fun. The real chagrin was felt at home. The shining admiration his young son once had shown for Dad in hunting clothes and with gun and cartridge belt had turned into disdain for his dissimilarity to Daniel Boone. "Aw, Dad never shoots nothing." And lately it was, "Like it isn't your bag, man." His only defense was to turn it into a joke. In jocular self-deprecation he'd say that probably he was too goodhearted to hurt anything. Especially a deer. They were so beautiful. "What I really like is to be out in the mountains. High up on a ridge at sunrise. Nothing can compare to it. Carrying a gun just serves as an excuse." But his eyes never really smiled when he said it.

The only one not to twit him was his wife. Every year she went through the ritual of preparing his bag, fussing about warm underwear, wool socks, plenty of handkerchiefs and tissues, and even Band-Aids. Who could tell what might happen there way out in the mountain, everyone shooting right and left. For her it was sending a big boy out for a week of rough play, and she was satisfied to have him back safely. Secretly she was just as happy not to have him

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come back with a deer. The mess and bother of having a dead animal hanging in the garage. And Norman Hart's unspoken thought was always that one day he'd show them all. Something absolutely astounding in the way of a felled buck deer.

And now another day had gone. The day before his last for that year. Just tomorrow remained in which to bring off the wonder and the surprise. As he cast a last accusing glance around the perfect setting, he felt little faith that tomorrow would be any different from any of the other hunting days, first or last. Gun nestled in the crook of his arm, he began the descent. It was after four o'clock in the afternoon, and to get down before dark he had to get moving, and going down a mountain without an undue amount of noise is trickier than ascending quietly. Even so it was worth exercising care, for this was the time the deer came down from the heights to spend the night in the valley. And it was a good time. Many a buck were taken just around this time when the shadows spread like tousled yarn from under boulders and evergreens and the light turned thin and eerie among the trees. His spirits rose as he took his way stealthily downward, stopping now and then to scan a nervous flicker among the winter leaves of the beech saplings, or a dusk-hung spot under a hemlock. If he ran into a buck coming out from the briars right there, its horns shining ash-grey like wind-beaten wood in the twilight. What a shot! And then tomorrow, his last day, it would hang from a tree on the lawn of the inn, and he would laze around, recapitulating how he took it—"We sorta ran into each other."

Then a flat stone underfoot went *clock* against another. The sound rang out, sharp and metallic in the still woods. Damning the tricky footholds, Hart stopped in his track, holding his breath as if by that he could hold back the sound already broadcast. Then he cursed again, almost tearfully. With their long receptive ears and acute sense of hearing, deer picked up a warning sound like the one he just made within a radius of two hundred yards or more, and would move on so stealthily he'd never know they'd been close. With desperate hope he carefully felt his way downward—maybe that one *clock* of the stone hadn't scared them off. He listened intently. It was very still there under the trees where the moss was thicker and not even the dry leaves rustled. He just had to get that buck, just had to. Just could not go back this year again without having taken his buck. Just couldn't. It was as simple as that. Then a stone that had felt firm when he probed it broke loose and

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went tumbling downhill. To hold his own balance Hart blindly grabbed for a low-hanging branch without seeing that it was dead-wood. Down it came and with it he, stumbling and crashing about till finally he regained balance, in time to hear a complementing snapping of twigs and breaking of branches further below—and there he saw, not one, but two—four—six! Six deer fleeing in graceful bounding leaps, their white tails flowing like wind-blown winter flowers, as the small herd gaily and seemingly playfully vaulted into disappearance among the nude trees and darkening undergrowth. Then all was still in the woods. Only a dry, papery rustle came from the branches of the young beeches when the soft wind stirred the pale, flame-shaped leaves that would hang on till next year's green shoots would push them off. But that phenomenon occurred at a time when Norman Hart never found himself in the woods. He now was too discouraged even to swear. No point now to walk slowly and soundlessly. He might as well abandon himself to the luxury of just plunging forward and out of the mountain and back to the inn with its food and warmth and consoling comforts. He still had tomorrow. So, maybe.

Below, at the cutout by the old logging road where he had left his car, there now was a good-sized line of vehicles parked, and the clearing was alive with red-coated, checker-breeched men in peaked caps and with guns, smoking, talking, drinking beer out of cans. These were the hunters come down out of the mountain, and whose shooting he sporadically had heard throughout the day. Hart took pleasure in these impromptu hunt meets. After ten to twelve hours of lonely quest up in the mountains it worked as a restorative to fall in with briefly gathered, uncomplicated democracies of red coats and high-powered rifles. No one demanded to know anything about the next man, and expected only to be listened to. Not that the topic of conversation ever varied, but that was part of the ritual. The subject, after all, was just one: Deer. But Hart liked it. There was something in that simple, consciously concentrated masculinity, and in talk that moved repetitiously and endlessly within a legalized and strictly limited premise of killer instinct that fascinated him.

"See anything?" he was asked, as he came up.

"Naah—scared up a bunch of does a while back," he answered, in a carefree tone. Pushing the cap back from his perspiring forehead, he sat himself down at the edge of the road, lit a cigarette, and asked, with the same nonchalant air: "Anybody got anything?" and was told that a couple

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of guys had taken out a six pointer and a spike horn.

"And there's still plenty of them up there," someone else added.

"Just gotta have the luck to run across them," said Hart, blowing out a cloud of smoke. It was easy in a group like this to dispatch the whole heart-breaking mishap out in the woods with the tolerant air of a seasoned hunter.

"About does, listen to this," offered someone, picking up the earlier cue. "I was sitting on a log this morning, and b'geez, a doe comes up to me so close I could've touched her." The phenomena of does sidling up to hunters sitting still was an aspect that never lost its charm in telling, any more than the corollary fact that deer catch the scent of man from far off. "You never can tell what a deer will do," came from one man. "I'm sitting up on a ledge one time, an' I see two guys on the trail below me, tiptoeing along, all ears, guns ready—the business, you know—and b'gosh, there right behind 'em, following 'em is an eight-point buck—*following* them!" Yes, deer were unpredictable.

"A lot of it is luck," said Hart again.

"We-ell, I dunno," a man who appeared to be one of the locals spat a jet of tobacco on the ground and asked if anybody there had seen "ol' Anse Eden bring out a fifteen, sixteen pointer." Those within hearing wanted to know who was Anse Eden.

"Lives acrosst the mountain here, on the other side," the local fellow shifted the tobacco cud to the other side of his mouth. "Never does bring down a buck o' less than twelve, thirteen points. Got one, twenty-one points oncet. I counted 'em m'self. Call it luck, if you will."

"Twenty-one points!" blurted out Hart. "I didn't know anything came that big!"

"It doesn't very often. But when it does, ol' Anse knows where to get 'em. Those old bucks are wise, and know how to get away—or they'd never get to be that old and big." He shifted his cud around again, jetted another stream of tobacco juice onto the ground, and said he'd have to push off. That acted as a signal for the rest, who separated with scattered comments of doubts or disbelief in his anecdote. "That guy was talking about Santa Claus and his reindeers." "See you tomorrow—with your fifteen pointer." Dusk changed into near darkness, car doors slammed, the headlights cut swaths through the murk, and the gravel grated under the wheels. "Good luck to ye." "Same to you," mumbled Hart. He alone now remained where he was, musing over what he just heard. Fifteen, sixteen pointers.

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He wondered if the reason he alone never got a deer was that fundamentally he lacked the killer instinct. But he never even truthfully could say that he shot and missed. *Like it isn't your bag, man.* The thought of it drew a crooked smile from him, and he shrugged, and rose. Nothing was gained by sitting at the roadside in the dark. Then a noise out of the stillness of the woods made him turn. A figure emerged. It appeared to be a boy dragging something heavy behind him. What heavy burden but a deer would anyone be dragging out of the woods at this time. Hart took a step closer and saw that what he had thought was a boy turned out to be an old man, quite old and bent, standing no more than about five feet. But what he was dragging was impressive. It was a buck deer, all right, but of a size Norman Hart never had seen outside zoological gardens. The hulk of it nearly took his breath away. "Good God!" he gasped, "where did you get this one!" Whether the question was deemed too fatuous for an answer, or he had no taste for conversation, the old man merely grunted in reply. He let the rope slip from his hand, and with a breath of relief started to rub the spot where the rope had bit in. Hart noticed that though the hands were gnarled and bony, with prominent veins, they looked strong and capable. He would have liked to ply the old hunter with questions and talk about his kill, how he did it and where in the mountains did specimens of this kind exist. But there was something of inwardness in the other's slow, deliberate movements, the way he sat himself down on the haunch of his immense kill, resting the long-barreled gun between his knees, without looking up to where Hart stood, and instead fished out a pipe and a can of tobacco and lit up. To Hart it conveyed the uneasy feeling that the old man did not welcome the garrulity of city folk. In the flare of the match the face was sharply revealed, high cheekboned and grizzly, but with grey eyes that were clear and keen and, Hart thought, almost hard. A strange old fellow. A suspicion began forming in Hart's mind. His gaze shifted back to the buck. Instinctively he began counting . . . four . . . six . . . eight . . . ten . . . mmm, twelve! No, thirteen with that little point . . . No, by God, there were more, hidden by the grass . . . fourteen . . . sixteen . . . God Almighty! *Eighteen* points! Hart drew a deep, quavering breath. The old man couldn't be anyone but . . . Hart felt as if he were standing before something mystic, a spirit of the woods. "You . . . you're Eden, aren't you

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. . . Anse Eden?" He tried to sound as matter of fact as he could.

The answer was an abrupt "Yup" without an accompanying glance. It dispelled the magic somewhat. Hart bent down over the carcass and ran his hand over the rich pelt, still warm from the life that had fled. Almost as an act of reverence he brushed off some leaves and twigs that had attached to the body as it was dragged over the ground. It occurred to him that it must weigh well over two hundred pounds as it lay, cleaned and bled out. Remembering the local man having said that Anse Eden lived on the other side of the mountain, he hesitantly asked the old man how he planned to get the deer home. "You live way over on the other side, don't you?"

"Traver's Hollow," said he, flatly, barely moving his lips, and then added, in a slightly more communicative tone, "never meant to come clear acrosst, but this fellow here kept me walking." But then, as if he regretted his sudden flight of eloquence, he snapped his jaw shut, returning his attention to the glowing center in the bowl of his pipe. How he planned to get his deer home he evidently considered a private matter. The situation of an unwieldy deer carcass on his hands and a three thousand feet high mountain to circumvent without means of transportation appeared not to trouble him. Hart would have offered to drive the old fellow with his deer, but he had heard that country people were suspicious of help proffered too readily and quickly by strangers. Still and all, he could not just stand there, or get into his car and leave the man and his deer and the whole incident behind. It was now almost totally dark, stars were out, but it would be hours before the moon came up. Under whatever pretext that would serve he intended to prolong this chance meeting, in some way relate himself, if ever so tenuously, to this stupendous kill. Nearness and some identification with that slain animal, which for the old man apparently was an ordinary beast, took on a vatic significance. But he mustn't appear to be pushing himself on them. *Them*. Already in his mind he invested the slain deer with its own distinct personality. Taking the other's slow speech and movements as standard, he gently prodded the barely visible hulk with the toe of his boot, and after a mumbled observation that it indeed was a heavy brute, he said, measuredly and slowly, "You still gotta get it home, though—and if you want I'd be glad to . . ." there he let the sentence hang, waiting to see what reaction it produced.

At first the other appeared not

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to have heard. But then he shifted the pipe to the other side of his mouth, and without shifting his gaze, said, "Sommun I know s'bound to pass. I'll jess set."

Avoiding contradiction, Hart nodded in gentle agreement, emphasizing it with a properly acquiescent inarticulate sound. He permitted an adequate pause to elapse. Then, not forgetting the slow tempo and casual tone, he said, "It *is* getting on—I'll be glad to take it home for you. If you want."

After the usual interlude of silence the old man spoke up, but after the custom and good manners of the mountain people instead of directly accepting an offered favor he observed, elliptically, "You seem to have a good, strong car . . . but I wouldn't want you sh'd put yo'self out." It was the longest speech Hart had heard him make, but he instinctively knew that both its length and involution meant acceptance, or the reply would have been a negative grunt, or no reply at all.

"Just help me get this baby on the hood," he said, forgetting in his eagerness to sound slow and languid.

It took some heaving and grunting to get the magnificent animal onto and securely strapped to the hood of his car, and it was not until it was all nearly done that the irony of the situation struck him. His car that never had transported even the smallest spike horn now had this champion of all taken bucks—but belonging not to him, Norman Hart, but to someone else—an old, wizened man, who looked as if he'd barely be able to aim a rifle. How easy it would be for Hart just to leap into the car and tear off with the deer, no lights on, nothing, before the oldster even realized what was happening, or had time to note the license number. The unpremeditated thought set his heart to beating furiously. What a show that would make, coming home with a kill like that. He had to straighten himself up and take a deep breath. The old man gave the carcass a finishing slap on the haunch. Farewell pat! But then he turned and opened the door next to the driver's seat, that happened to be unlocked. That was that. "Do get in," Hart urged.

His hand trembled with relief as he turned the ignition key. It had been a moment of temptation the like he never in his life had experienced. He switched on the headlights, and everything beyond the swaths of illumination was plunged in blackness. Hart knew the way to take to get around the range he had hunted in, and drove on without needing directions. After a mile or so down the road from the spot where he nearly had become a

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thief, he felt calmer. The temptation removed, his fear of it evaporated, for he knew himself to be an honest man. Incorruptibly honest. A lingering sense of unease, however, remained. Then he realized that they had been driving without saying a word. For Hart, as with most people, sharing a confined space in silence produced a feeling of embarrassment. The void about them must be filled with conversation, or at any rate and in most cases, talk, on anything or nothing. Words served as cushions against the terror of two people facing one another in silence. Also he was conscious of the form strapped to the hood, its branching horns shining like part of a wind-fallen tree behind the glare of the headlights. Hart pushed a cigarette between his lips. "How much would you say a hunk of meat like that weighed?" he asked, holding the lighter up to his face. "Two hundred pounds? Two fifty?"

" 'Bout that."

"Some hunk of meat. Suppose a guy wanted to sell it—how much d'you think it would bring?"

"Dunno. Never sold no buck."

"Of course not," Hart hurried to say. "After all, it is against the law, I know that. I just wondered." Left to his wonder by the other's uncommunicativeness, Hart speculated on whether he really would consider buying the buck, and pass it off as one he himself had shot. No one would know once he was out of the mountain. No one but himself would ever know. *Like it isn't your bag, man.* To break the mood, he said, "My name is Hart."

"Glad to meet ye."

"Hart means deer, you know," he pursued. The information elicited no reply at all. Unable to bear the weight of silence, for Hart a frightening, unknown element, like atmosphere without oxygen, he went on, with feigned lightness: "That didn't help much today, though."

"We take the next turn to the left," the old man said. With that Hart had his attention engaged. The wood road that Anse indicated went into the mountains, at first smoothly, but as they began climbing, the going was rougher. Roots and boulders protruded where the old road had been washed out by torrents from above when it rained, and as they bumped along Hart wondered about the springs on the car. Meanwhile overhanging branches whipped and brushed against windshield and top. Finally a clearing appeared, and simultaneously the lightbeams struck the rickety porch of a frame house, weather-beaten and paint-bare even at first glance.

"This is it," Anse said.

Hart pulled up before a lean-

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to in which stood an old-fashioned Model T Ford, high-wheeled and archaic. Hart thought that the old relic would bring a good sum on the market, but said nothing. Anse Eden opened the door, and slid out. Hart sat for a moment, his eyes on the body of the deer. It looked as if it just had come out of the surrounding woods and decided to lie down for a rest. His brief acquaintance with the magnificent stag was now at an end. *One light pressure of his foot on the accelerator, a turn of the wheel, and he would be off through the woods!* There were no other houses around. No telephone poles. On the open highway, a hundred miles an hour. Nobody'd know. The old man living out in the woods could easily get another buck. Wasn't he Anse Eden. Hart's blood pounded wildly, his hands gripped the wheel. "We'll hang him on this here beam," came Anse's voice from the back. Hart shut the motor off, and stepped out. His forehead was drowned in perspiration. "I guess this chain'll do," he heard the old man say.

Getting the deer untied and hung up did not take long. "There you are, pop, all set. Okay?" Hart gave the cooling flank one last, caressing pat. He turned toward his car, with almost a sense of relief. All done and finished. There it would hang, the branching glory of its antlers unadmired, the carcass reduced piecemeal in furnishing food for the old hermit.

"Thought ye might like to come in an' set a while," the old man said, as Hart had his hand on the door handle.

"Thanks, I'd better not," Hart declined. "I got to push off."

Anse shoved the cap to the back of his head. "Mr. Hart," he began, hesitantly, "I am mighty beholden to ye . . ." Hart smilingly waved his hand, "Think nothing of it. I enjoyed it."

"You did want to take a buck purty bad, didn't you," old Anse went on.

"Guess I do," Hart answered, smile fading slowly. "I've been trying, but . . . that's the way luck runs."

"All of it ain't luck. Could be I might be able to help ye."

"If anyone could it'd be you," Hart answered, with deep conviction.

The old man pondered a moment. "You done a mighty nice thing for me tonight. It'd be good if you came in a spell."

This time Hart complied without protestation.

Inside the house it smelled of kerosene and cold ashes. Anse lit an overhead kerosene lamp, and soon had a fire going in the huge old-time kitchen stove. The rawness of the air fled, and even the warmed-over coffee spread a

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homey fragrance. From his seat at the oilcloth-covered table Hart took stock of the place. It appeared that the kitchen was the only room occupied in the house. In the corner near the stove stood an old brass bedstead, the bedclothes still rumpled. About the walls, on pegs and hooks with lines strung across, hung an assortment of pants, underwear and heavy socks; one was dominated by a pair of snow shoes. "I suppose you do get snowed in now and then," Hart ventured.

"Purty near all winter." The declaration sounded almost cheerful. Hart smiled, trying to picture himself holed up in the white loneliness of the mountain. "Gets lonely, doesn't it," he said.

"Never been lonely yet," was the decisive reply. "Deer comes right up to the door here in winter." Slowly, almost ruminatively he spoke of how the animals of the woods came up to the house, hares and foxes, even one and another sleepy bear that had gotten out of its lair as if by mistake. "On'y critter I never could get frien'ly with much is the wildcat." And there were the birds, large and small, from wild turkeys down. He had three barn owls out in the shed right now. "Keep the mice away, they do."

While listening, Hart's glance had gone round the room. He noticed then that all the pegs and hooks appeared to be deer horn, also that many other articles, knife handles, grips to pots and pans were made out of antlers. Following his glance, the old man nodded. "Yup, all deer horn, and warn't one of them antlers had less'n twelve points. Tell you this, Mr. Hart," he went on, with unwonted talkativeness, "I ain't never shot a deer smaller'n twelve points. Meat doesn't have no taste afore an animal gets to have twelve to thirteen points. The more the tastier. See them antlers over there—none of 'em less'n fourteen points, no sir."

Hart turned his eyes again to what before he had taken to be a pile of fire wood. Deer antler upon spreading deer antler. The mystique of the old man, the woods, the entire, unfamiliar ambiance filled him strangely. In it covetousness suddenly sprouted, like a weed. "I'm no judge of taste in deer meat," he said, "but I know one thing—marketing. I tell you, market this secret of yours. I'll go in with you. We'll clean up, make a million. I guarantee you a million."

The old man shook his head. "Nope. I ain't aimin' to sell nuthin'. Need no million. Too many fool hunters in the woods as it is. But you've been nice, Mr. Hart, mighty nice, and I'll see that you get yo'r buck. I'm gonna let you have some." With that he rose and went to a corner cabinet and returned with a brown quart bot-

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tle half filled with a dark liquid. "A drink o' this now, and another afore going out in the morning, an' ye'll git yer buck, I'll lay ye."

"A drink of that will help me getting a buck?"

Old Anse sat down, holding the bottle up against the overhead light. The contents of it showed black and opaque. "Yep, this stuff here, ye drink it an' it takes away yer smell."

"It takes away what! My smell?"

The old man nodded. "Lookit," he said, "what all wild animals fear more'n anything is the scent of man. Let 'em catch that scent, and they'll all run. Now, this stuff here takes the man smell away, an' ye'll smell jess like a deer."

"I—I'll smell like a deer?"

The other nodded. "Ye kin walk right in among 'em—an they'll jess take ye for one of their own."

Hart stared at the bottle. "How long will I smell like a deer?" he wanted to know. Old Anse assured him that if he took a drink now and one the next morning the effect would last through the day, giving him time to choose his buck from any he saw. And thanks to the fact that he smelled like one of them he could approach them quite freely. "What kind of stuff is it?" asked Hart. It seemed to him as if he had been drifting away from reality ever since he met up with the old man and his deer.

The concoction, he was told, was a secret. It was composed of various herbs and roots and some very particular fluids taken from a rutting buck deer at full moon. Originally the knowledge of it had come from an old trapper, half Mohawk, who before dying passed it on to Anse Eden—"An' when I go, the secret goes with me." He reached out for a jelly jar which served as drinking glass and which appeared not to have been exposed to the action of soap and water for some time, poured it half full, and urged Hart to drink it.

Neither the looks of it nor the description of its composition tempted Hart's appetite for it, and an exploratory sip twisted his face into a grimace. But its reputed power made him close his eyes and swallow the brew in one draught. He shuddered as he felt the stuff descending. Old Anse nodded approval. Just one more drink like that one next morning before going out. That would do it. What remained of the bottle could be saved until next year's hunting season. It never lost its potency. Hart was aware of an almost numbing sensation in his insides. It was not altogether unpleasant. "Remember," said old Anse suddenly, and with a mischievous glint in his eyes, "don't ever take that stuff in the mating season, or the does will go all over ye."

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All the way down the rutted old woods road he tried to think clearly about the evening's events, beginning with the old man coming out of the woods with his huge kill. Then of the two instances when he nearly had turned into a hijacker and thief. That part no longer bothered him. It was the latter phase of the adventure, in the old man's cabin in the woods. At this point he could not make up his mind definitely whether to attach any credence or significance to the properties the old man had claimed for the strange mixture he pressed on Hart, or whether to pass off the whole incident, and that he actually had consented to swallow the loathsome mixture, to his momentarily having fallen under the spell of the woods, the old hermit, and his own exacerbated desire to bring a deer back to the city. A desire so out of proportion that reality for an instant had slipped away.

Coming to the end of the mountain road where it joined the main road, he stopped. The moon was up now, and the road gleamed like a white ribbon between the dark borders. Tomorrow at some time he would be driving on that road, homeward to the city. With a deer? Tomorrow was his last day of hunting. He thought of other last days, year after year. He tried to recall his own feelings during these drives back, the hood of his car empty. Somehow it was all lost in a blurr of time. Only this very moment seemed real. He moved, and felt the bulk of the bottle in the pocket of his jacket. He fished it out and looked at it. Ought he to toss it out of the window? Act like a normal, grown-up man not believing in fairy tales? He had been a normal man all his life.

Then, abruptly, and with unwonted resolution he uncorked it, put it to his mouth and drained it to the dregs.

He slept badly that night. Every least sound alerted him, and he sat upright in the bed. Earlier than needed he was up. For breakfast he refused the eggs and bacon, but ate hungrily of the dry cereal and milk, and took several slices of toast. There was no question but what the vile emulsion he had drunk the night before had given him an appetite.

Once out in the woods he thought he never had seen the woods so clearly and with such delight and appreciation. Every tree, rock and bush stood out with unwonted clarity, and he walked with springy, fleeting steps that took him silently over the ground. Yes, the evening before had wrought a change within him, that was certain. An optimism and joy filled him to the point where he felt like leaping over

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the ground. Only the restraining knowledge that he was out hunting made him proceed with caution.

A ways up he spotted the red coat of a hunter, but instead of the usual nod or salute he sidled past, closely but unnoticed. This was fun. He went on, treading softly over the ground pine and the moss-covered rocks. Then he ran into deer. A large, sleek doe with her young still following her looked up as he stepped out from behind a screen of briars. He stopped still. At first the doe shied, but then she stretched her neck forward, testing the scent on the air. Hart stood still, heart pounding. The doe evidently was puzzled. Extending her long neck, she sniffed the cool morning air with her sharp, black-shining woodsy muzzle, her leaf-shaped ears held straight out from the head, the sun catching in them so the intricate tracery of red veins showed within their softly furred, translucent outlines. She sniffed and sniffed. In Hart the pulses pounded like trip hammers.

"It's working," he thought, "working. I smell like a deer to her." He made a movement with his arms, and the doe leapt backwards, her tail signaling to the fawns to keep behind her. But she did not run off. She remained in her tracks, clearly confused. Only when Hart began walking toward her did she finally take off, her fawns following.

Hart was jubilant, but somehow the joy had nothing to do with the knowledge that his natural odor mysteriously had changed. It was jubilation over being out in a forest that suddenly appeared filled with myriad new sounds and other dimensions: he was keen to strange crepitations under leaves and stones, attentive to the signal call of birds, to the chatter of squirrels, and the tapping out of indecipherable messages by the woodpeckers on the deadwood trees, and to the smell that welled up, meady and rich like brown winter ale, from the ground. Suddenly a new scent hit his nostrils. He had never smelt it before—warm, alive, faintly musky—but he knew it instinctively. It was the scent of deer. And there they were. This time it was two does and their yearling fawns. The stuff within him must be accelerating, for now he himself could in turn catch their scent.

Once more he delighted in the confusion of the animals as they reacted to the familiar, tranquilizing scent coming from a shape associated with danger. This time he walked right past them without their being frightened off. They stood there, clipping their long ears, wonder in their large,

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velvet woodland eyes. He walked on, as if drawn somewhere. He tried to think back to the night before, of the old man, wondering what he would say were he to see him now. But the recall did not come clearly. It was as if the preceding day and evening had happened a long, long time ago. His mind now was occupied solely with catching and separating the various smells of the wild animals and of the forest. It was as if eons of time had rolled back, down to the incunabula of man when he stalked about, a primordial hunter.

After a while he decided to sit down. He chose a rock overlooking a glen, not unlike the one he had watched the day before. This time he knew his vigil would not be long. He held the gun ready. One shot would be enough. Moments passed. Two nutchucks chased one another twitteringly from twig to twig. A cobweb glittered, jewel-strung in the sunlight. Time passed. But Hart was not conscious of time.

Then a branch snapped. A soft and stealthy footfall. On the wind came a scent that alerted him. It was a kind his sense of smell never before had discerned. He rose. The gun went to his shoulder. The aim was sure. Sure, sure, sure. Dead at the heart. And the shot rang out! The shot rang out, and the red-coated hunter made a crazy, arms-out backward leap, and fell to the ground.

Hart stood for a moment with the sound of the shot ringing in his ears. Then he slowly lowered the gun and took off, in bounding, sailing leaps, up and away toward the sunlit summit of the mountain. ◄

(*From page 44*)

listening to the waterfalls. He didn't say anything else, so I went back to the truck and was relayed down to the coast, where in a few hours I'd get my flight out. Perhaps a few days off, if Colonel Cohen would allow it.

I had a word to say to him about Vogl, and a request to be allowed to speak for Vogl at the next Inter-Dominion meeting, although it was more than two months off. It did seem to me it was time to space-freight a few less dairy goats and sacks of seed, and a few more people, young ones, full of vigor and new ideas, going both ways, to earth and to Vogl. It was true I was only a Pippa, but everyone is allowed a voice at Inter-Dominion, and I thought it was time some of us got up and spoke. ◄

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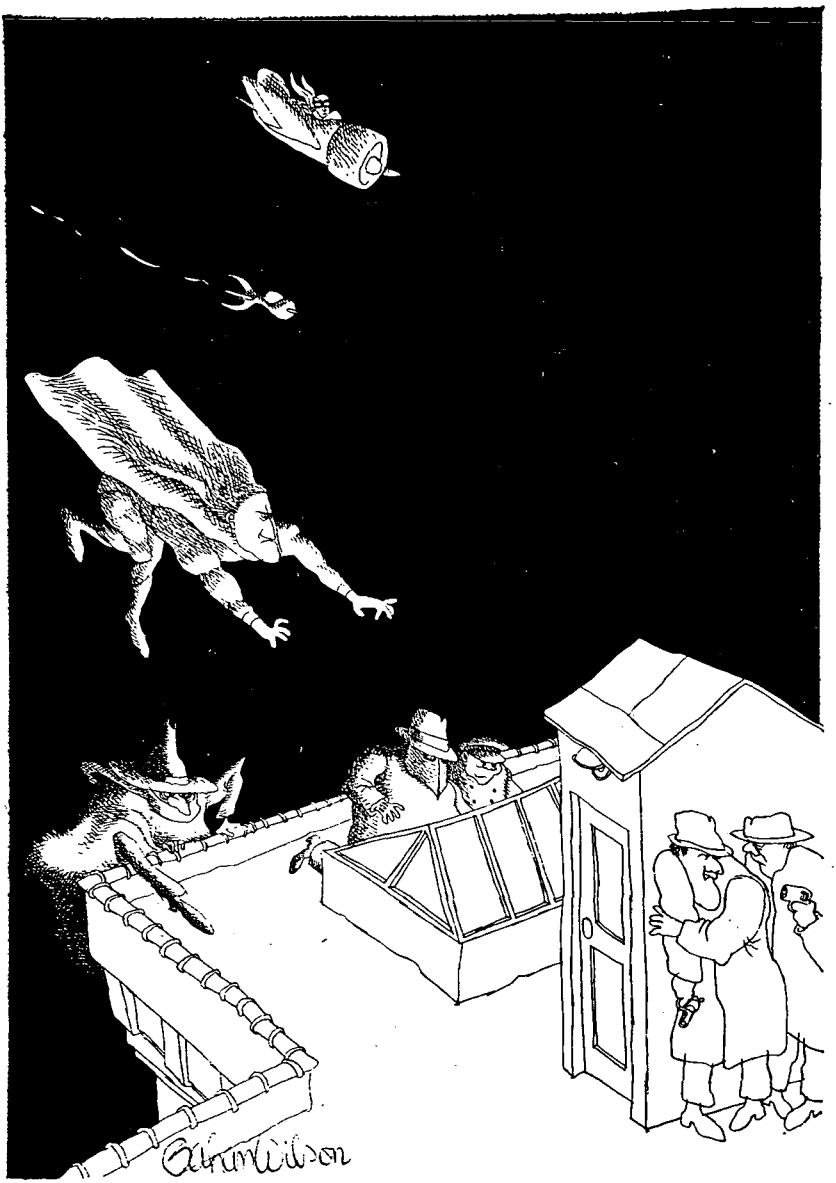

"The thing that gets me is I sent boxtops in to everyone of these bums!"

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Manly Wade Wellman will be familiar to long-time readers of F&SF as the author of the popular series of stories about John and his silver-strung guitar. Wade Wellman, his son, is a published poet who is presently professor of English at Clarke College. Their collaboration places three Conan Doyle heroes, Holmes, Watson and Challenger, in the middle of Wells's Martian invasion, and the result is most unusual and entertaining.

THE ADVENTURE OF THE MARTIAN CLIENT

by Manly W. Wellman and Wade Wellman

H. G. WELLS'S THE WAR OF THE WORLDS is a frequently inaccurate chronicle by a known radical and atheist, a companion of Frank Harris, George Bernard Shaw, and worse. He exaggerates needlessly and pretends to expert scientific knowledge which he does not possess. Yet scientists and layman applaud him, while scorning the brilliant deductions of Sherlock Holmes and Professor George Edward Challenger.

Wells refers to the magnificent and almost complete specimen of an invader preserved in spirits at the Natural History Museum, but utterly overlooks the history of its capture, examination and presentation. And scholarly journals and the popular press disregard Challenger's proof that the invaders were not Martians after all. After consulting Holmes, I have decided to put the facts on record for posterity.

When the invasion began, fear overwhelmed every human being except the two wisest and bravest men I have ever known. On that Friday morning when the first Mars-based cylinder fell at Woking, I went to Highgate, where poor Murray, my orderly during the Second Afghan War, lay critically ill in his lodgings. As I arrived, newspapers and jabbering

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neighbors reported strange beings from Mars, said to be destroying the London suburbs. Other occupants of the house fled, I never learned where or to what fate. For seven days I did what I could for my patient, while all about us whirled terror and fire and clouds of what has since been called the Black Smoke. I heard the deafening roars of fighting-machines signaling each other, and several times glimpsed them afar, a hundred feet high on their scurrying, jointed legs. Their Heat-Rays knocked nearby houses into exploding flames, but we escaped.

Murray died on the eighth day, the second Friday. I straightened his body on the bed and crossed his hands on his breast. Then I peered out and wondered how to escape.

Sooty dust left by the Black Smoke strewed the slopes below, and I thanked God that Highgate's elevation had spared me that deadly contact. I saw a forlorn dog trotting, which meant that the vapor became harmless when it settled. I saw a fighting-machine, too, among distant houses, and decided not to venture out by daylight. Some cheese and stale bread and a bottle of ale made my evening meal, with poor, silent Murray for company.

When June twilight deepened to dusk, I emerged and headed southward for Baker Street.

A fairly straight route would be no more than five miles. But as I approached Primrose Hill, I saw shifting sheets of green light there. Crouching behind red weed near the London and Northwestern tracks, I made out half a dozen machines, standing silently together. That meant a central concentration of the enemy, I decided, and stole eastward along the railway.

I got lost among dark, wrecked streets. At dawn I sheltered in a half-smashed house. There was water in a pitcher, but no food. I slept fitfully on a sofa, rousing again and again to look out the windows. No fighting-machines appeared, though twice I saw hurrying shadows, doubtless cast by flying-machines. At nightfall I headed south again, often going far out of my way to skirt heaps of wreckage.

At midnight I saw lights, white, not green. Hastening toward them, I judged that they beat up from Piccadilly Circus. But before I came near, I saw a gleaming metal tower—a fighting-machine again—and hid in a cellar. There I cowered, miserably hungry and thirsty, until Sunday noon. At last I slunk, like the hunted animal I had become, to cross Regent Street and move west on Piccadilly. I reached Baker Street, and saw no destruction. I walked along, ready at a moment to dive for shelter, until I came to the door of 221-b. The

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familiar entry seemed strange and hushed. Up the stairs I fairly crawled, then along the passage, to turn the knob of the door. It was unlocked, and I came home at last.

Sherlock Holmes lifted his lean face. He sat in his favorite chair, filling his cherry wood pipe from the Persian slipper.

"Thank God you're safe," I croaked, sinking into my own chair. He rose quickly and poured me a glass of brandy, which I drank slowly.

"You have been here all the time?" I managed to ask.

"Not all the time. On Sunday night, at the first news of disaster, I escorted Mrs. Hudson to the railroad station. The crowds were so big and unruly that I went with her to Donnithorpe in Norfolk, where her relatives took her in. On Monday, the flight from London moved eastward below Donnithorpe, with Martians in pursuit. Then there was comparative quiet, and on Wednesday I returned cautiously on foot, to look for you. I have hoped for your return since I reached here Thursday evening. I have hoped, too, for word from my friend, Professor Challenger."

On the table were sardines, cracknels and a bottle of claret. Eagerly I ate and drank as I told my adventures. "But who is Professor Challenger?" I asked.

"One of England's most brilliant zoologists. He would say the most brilliant by far, for his egotism is enormous, though pardonable. Do you remember a magazine article some weeks back, about an egg-shaped crystal that reflected strange scenes and creatures?"

"I read it because young Jacoby Wace, the assistant demonstrator at St. Catherine's was concerned. Before he could secure the crystal from the store where it had been taken, a tall, dark man in grey had bought it and vanished."

"What does the tall, dark man in grey suggest?" inquired Holmes.

"To me? Why, nothing of any consequence."

"Really, Watson, and you admired my grey suit from Shingleton's. I gave the crystal to Challenger for observation. When the first invading cylinder struck at Woking, I hurried to his home in West Kensington. Mrs. Challenger said he had joined the scientists at Woking. I fear he was killed by the Heat-Ray, along with Ogilvy and the Astronomer Royal, Stent."

"May I come in?" boomed a voice from the passage outside.

The door opened and in tramped a squat, heavy man with the chest of a gorilla and the black beard of an Assyrian king. I judged him to be in his late thirties. He wore dark trousers and a rather boyish tweed jacket.

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In one huge, hairy hand he clamped an oblong leaden box, of the sort in which choice tea is packed.

"I've come twice, Holmes, but you were out," he said.

"I must have been observing the Martians or laying in provisions," said Holmes.

Brilliant blue eyes under shaggy brows raked me from head to foot.

"Medium height, well built," the deep voice rolled out. "Dolichocephalic—prominent cheekbones. Celtic. Perhaps Scottish. You are good, Holmes, to give shelter to this poor vagrant."

"No, Challenger, this is my associate, Dr. Watson."

"I would be better for a shave and clean linen," I admitted, heading for my own room. I soaped grime away and shaved my bristly chin. Then I changed clothes and returned to our sitting room.

"I got a carriage and drove my wife to the channel coast on Monday," Challenger was saying. "After seeing her aboard a ship for France, I returned on foot."

"Would not the ship take you?" asked Holmes.

"My presence is needed here," Challenger growled. "My intelligence—perhaps yours too, in a lesser degree—may cope successfully with these Martians. Off the coast, the ironclad ram *Thunder Child* destroyed two before she sank. Earlier, near Woking, artillery smashed a machine before the Heat-Ray wiped out every man and gun." His beard tilted. "We may yet survive, even triumph against them."

"How?" I demanded. "They have science and armament unthinkably greater than ours."

"Reflect, Watson," Holmes urged. "These few Martians could bring only relatively simple equipment across space. They are like hunters with sporting rifles—no artillery or high explosives—attacking a swarm of baboons. And the baboons are on familiar ground. They can roll rocks down slopes to crush their enemies, or lurk in ambush to grapple them. Beasts have defeated men on occasion. Rats evade the trap, foxes outwit the huntsman—"

"Marvelous, Holmes!" I could not help applauding, for his calm analysis gave me a flicker of hope.

"Elementary," said Challenger, before Holmes could speak. "It is not enough to state the obvious. When I saw the Martian machines at a disadvantage in the water, it occurred to me that their unfamiliarity with maritime warfare suggested unfamiliarity with other difficulties upon Earth. They might be destroyed by something other than our ineffectual weapons. Let us begin by saying that they are not invulnerable."

"Nor, as I deduce, do they seek

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to exterminate mankind," added Holmes.

"No. They descended upon London as the world's largest center of population, and they have a use for men. Last night I lurked near Piccadilly Circus, where somehow the lights had been turned on and hosts of people were dancing and drinking. A machine came and captured a hundred or so."

"For what?" I asked.

"For food," said Challenger. "With the crystal I have observed the Martians at their principal camp. Holmes says you have located it at Primrose Hill." He stroked his beard. "They esteem us as edible."

"I have wondered about that," said Holmes.

"I have watched, on three occasions, what happens to human captives," Challenger went on. "They are held down by the tentacles of smaller machines—I saw their mouths gape open to scream—while Martians gather and pierce their veins with metal pipettes. The living blood is drawn directly into Martian bodies."

"Horrible!" I exclaimed.

"Those drunken fools in Piccadilly Circus will be no loss to human society," said Challenger. "As for horror, how would an intelligent pig view our relish for his species? Their feeding methods, together with their obvious unacquaintance with many terrestrial factors, suggests a possible plan of campaign against them."

"And that?" Holmes prompted.

"Give them diseased victims, to infect them," replied Challenger.

"Deliver fellow human beings into their hands?" I asked, amazed.

"Not healthy specimens like us," Challenger assured me. "That would not be effective in our campaign, and we can do far more good to our cause if we are not captured. Now, Holmes, to accomplishment of the preliminary logistics of our counter-offensive."

"Watson is our military veteran," Holmes pointed out. "Very likely he will say that we might begin by doing as they do; capture a prisoner and make a useful study of him."

"Precisely the suggestion I was about to offer," nodded Challenger. "With certain resources we have, I venture to trust that we may soon come within reach of one of these creatures."

"And I venture to trust that we may not," I protested. "When they race after men in their machines, all a man can hope to do is get away. I count myself lucky to have stayed out of their sight. To be seen by a Martian is to be lost."

"Not inevitably," said Holmes, knocking ashes from his pipe.

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"Two days ago I came out of a shop where I had found a dozen tins of meat, and a machine almost stepped on me."

"And did you escape?" I cried.

"His presence here shows that he did," Challenger boomed at me. "The most minor rationality would tell you that."

"I ran back into the shop," Holmes related. "He smashed in the front, but I had dived into the cellar. At the rear was a coal bin, and I slid out through the trap into the alley. Then on through the back of a house behind, onto the next street and through more houses to safety. Nor did I lose the provisions I had foraged. We may be glad of them in the coming days."

"My dear Holmes, you showed presence of mind," I said.

"Say rather that I showed agility," he smiled the compliment away. "It was a tight squeeze getting out of the trap next the coal bin, but the rest was no great trouble. My adventure shows that we have the advantage of opposition on our own grounds."

"You were fortunate," remarked Challenger, eyeing Holmes's gaunt body. "Your feat might have been impossible to one of more solid, though more impressive, physical proportions. But machines have come to my house, too. I slipped away twice while they reached in at the windows. They destroyed nothing."

"Possibly they sought an object of value," suggested Holmes. "Have you seen these Martians in the crystal, without their machines?"

"I have, and plainly," replied Challenger. "Let me sketch one."

He rummaged out an envelope and a stylographic pencil. Swiftly he drew an oval body, with eyes and a V-shaped mouth set at one end between two bunches of whip-like tentacles.

"Like an octopus," I suggested.

"Somewhat, in appearance," granted Challenger. "This body is in reality a gigantic brain-case, for the most part, with motion of what I take to be the operation of lungs. Here at the back," and he shaded a circular area, "is what seems to be an eardrum, though perhaps not very effective in our dense atmosphere."

"They do use extremely loud signal sirens," commented Holmes. "I suggest that this anatomical specialization—little beyond a huge brain and nimble hands—argues a far greater evolutionary advance beyond man than ours beyond, say, those baboons. It might better be compared to our own evolution beyond much lower mammals."

"Might not the Martians be the result of highly organized and controlled eugenic specialization?" I ventured. "Stockbreeding develops similar swift strides toward a desired physical form."

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"A good analogy, Doctor," approved Challenger. "I am pleasurably surprised. And Holmes indicates that they may seek the crystal. Somehow it was sent to Earth, for observations here by way of a similar device that was once on Mars and now is here with the invasion. One crystal makes events visible in the neighborhood of its mate. A definite rapport between the two transmits images."

"As the telegraph transmits written messages, or the telephone spoken ones," amplified Holmes.

"For lack of a better term, we might call the process television," said Challenger. "Men could no more understand this crystal's properties than monkeys could rationalize the powers of lost binoculars. But let us have a look."

He opened the tea casket and took out something wrapped in black cloth. Loosening the folds, he revealed a clear, burnished crystal, egg-shaped and as large as his massive fist. I thought I saw a play of light, deep inside.

"You have had this at your home at the start of the invasion," reminded Holmes. "Why, would you say, did they not come for it at their very first advance into London?"

"Why, for that matter, do they seek it now?" I asked. "Would they not have other crystals, with the same qualities?"

"Perhaps none like this, which carries images across space to Mars itself," said Challenger. "I know it was Mars, for earlier I saw the landscape there, with two moons in the sky. I suggest that they need this particular crystal, to communicate with their home base on Mars."

"But not a week ago," Holmes pursued. "Gentlemen, this indicates a grave, even a desperate, necessity with them."

Again I studied the crystal. "Does it show images now?"

"We need darkness to see properly," said Challenger.

Holmes caught a dark drape from the sofa. We three crouched together, drawing the fabric over our heads and shoulders. In the gloom, the crystal gave stronger light. Movement was discernible, then a clear image—a sort of crumpled face, with dark, staring eyes.

"A Martian is looking into a crystal that matches impulses with this," said Holmes, his own hawk face peering.

"Repeatedly I have had such a close view of a Martian," said Challenger. "Doubtless traveling in a machine, to find this crystal. They searched close, but seemed baffled when I put the object into that lead casket. Possibly the lead interferes with the guiding impulse."

I bobbed out from under the drape. "Is a Martian coming here?"

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"Doubtless one is being guided by the crystal's vibrations," said Challenger, casting the drape aside. "He may be miles away, however."

Holmes strode to the window. "I take comfort, Challenger, that they did no damage to your house when the object was there."

Cold fear seized me. "Then a Martian is on his way to Baker Street?" I cried.

"Exactly," replied Challenger. "Like a client seeking help."

"And here, Watson, if I mistake not, comes our client now," reported Holmes, gazing out.

I sprang to his side, looking toward Portman Square. A fighting-machine stood on the pavement, high above the buildings. Its three tall legs quivered, as with palsy. Steel arms writhed from the great round body that housed its machinery. Its cowled head turned this way and that, seeming to peer near-sightedly.

"It must have been close at hand when I brought out the crystal," said Challenger, joining us.

The monster approached slowly, not like the scurrying machines I had seen a week before. It moved like a hunter on a trail.

Challenger tramped back across the room. He put the crystal inside the leaden box, and arranged the box, lid open, on the seat of a chair against the rear wall.

"The impulse will operate, but the view is of the ceiling only," he pronounced. "Your client, Holmes, will leave his machine to enter, lest he damage the house and lose the crystal. Then—"

From the corner of the mantel Holmes took a small bottle. From a neat morocco case he produced a hypodermic syringe.

"Holmes!" I protested. "Surely not, after a dozen years of total abstinence—"

"I would not use it now except that it is needed," he said, drawing the syringe full.

I looked out again. The Martian was opposite the houses only a few doors away.

"Into the corner, Watson," ordered Holmes, and I obeyed. He and Challenger pressed to the wall on either side of the window.

Metal clanked outside. A shadow dimmed the June sunlight. Holmes stood tense and lean as wire cable. Challenger's great frame hunched powerfully.

A cluster of tentacles groped across the sill like dark, searching snakes. After them pushed the strange face. Its eyes fixed on the chair where the casket lay. The triangular mouth drooled saliva. The tentacles braced on the floor and heaved. In came a great, bladdery bulk, as big as a bear. Its shiny, leathery hide twitched. It thumped heavily down on the floor.

Instantly Challenger leaped

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upon it. The tentacles writhed and grappled him. For all his strength he seemed clamped, strangled.

"Now, Holmes," he gasped, his face crimson.

Holmes stooped and darted the syringe to drive it into the heaving body, just behind the face.

The creature gave a bubbling cry. Challenger struggled free. Holmes darted the syringe back into the bottle, drew it full again, and bent to inject a second dose. Our visitor went slack. Its tentacles drooped, its eyes glazed. Only the heaving respiration showed that it lived.

I, too, came to look. My nostrils were assailed by a strong, sickening odor of decay.

"That Martian is dying," I said. "It is far gone in some fatal disease."

"Dying, yes," said Challenger, wiping his hands on his jacket. "Of disease, yes. But a Martian —no, my dear Doctor, no."

I stared, wide-eyed. Holmes turned his aquiline face toward Challenger.

"But we know it came from Mars," I argued. "The crystal proved that. And the blasts astronomers saw, when the cylinders departed. And at the oppositions of 1894 and 1896, there was evidence of gigantic artificial construction on Mars."

"I am not unacquainted with those phenomena," he said, studying the slowly stirring mass. "But bear in mind that no evidence of construction showed earlier than the 1894 opposition."

"Perhaps I eased the pain of the creature," said Holmes, returning bottle and syringe to the mantel. "Of what does it suffer, Watson?"

"To judge from the odor, it rots, even as it lives," I replied.

"Which indicates there are no bacteria of decay, wherever the invaders come from," put in Challenger. "They did not foresee this deadly ally of man. We survive because our systems have developed resistance through the aeons. But they came among us, breathing, feeding, drinking, and took death into themselves. Now they are sluggish in patrolling our streets. They are gathered in dismay on Primrose Hill. This one stumbled hither to get the crystal and signal across space for no more of his fellows to come."

"To sum up, the invasion is doomed," said Holmes, filling his pipe. "We need speculate no further on how to resist it."

"You say this is no Martian, but he came from Mars," I said to Challenger.

"Because Mars, with its lesser gravity, was a convenient base to launch the cylinders. But the creature's lungs show Mars was not his native planet."

"Its lungs move bulkily," I pointed out.

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"For this great mass of flesh—I estimate it at four hundred pounds—they are not particularly big. They would be fatally inadequate in a Martian atmosphere. Are you not acquainted with Stoney's spectroscopic observations of Mars? The atmosphere is extremely rare, with but a bare trace of oxygen. No, they came to Mars and existed there temporarily, with respirators of some sort, until they could accomplish the attack upon Earth."

"Where might they have originated, Challenger?" asked Holmes. "On a planet more distant from the sun?"

"From farther across space than that, as I conjecture. From another system. Who can say how many habitable worlds our universe holds?"

The strange thing moved no more. "It has died," I said.

"Then let us get it down to the cellar," said Holmes. "It will fit into a great tub there. Afterward we can venture out—and safely, as I judge—to fetch rum and brandy and whiskey from public houses and fill the tub to preserve this specimen for science."

All three of us bent to hoist the heavy, evil-smelling carcass.

A POSTSCRIPT BY THE JUNIOR COLLABORATOR

This story was ultimately the result of a thought which kept recurring to me when I saw the Sherlock Holmes movie, A Study in Terror, *in Dubuque, Iowa, last year. The film—easily the best Holmes movie I have ever seen—involved Holmes and Watson pitted against Jack the Ripper; the indicated time was about 1890. All through the film I kept wondering how a man like Holmes might have reacted to the Martian invasion about ten years later. H. G. Wells had imagined this event as taking place when Holmes, according to Doyle, was still actively solving cases in London, which meant that he would have been participant in the catastrophic flight described in the chapter entitled "The Exodus from London." The question of what Holmes and Watson were doing when the Martians landed kept plaguing me throughout the cinema. I passed it on subsequently to my father, and out of this developed the collaboration and the story which may be read here.*

H. G. Wells's THE WAR OF THE WORLDS, *first published in 1897, has even more relevance to our time than to the 1890's—as shown by the grotesque failure of the 1953 movie by the same title, which tried to update the conception to the 1950's, and ruined it completely. The story needs no updating. It is not really a science fiction novel but an extremely profound and magnificently conveyed philosophical conception. Man knows his relationship to lower animals on the earth; what is his*

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relationship to higher animals on other worlds? Wells's narrator, with stunningly effective concision, describes the Martian reaction to efforts made to signal them: "The Martians took as much notice of such advances as we would of the lowing of a cow." The conception which underlies the novel is timeless and can never become obsolete. In one respect, however, we were forced to deviate sharply from Wells's fictional structure: native intelligence on Mars nowadays seems so unlikely that it was necessary to make this alteration in the Wells canon.

The depth and magnitude of Wells's idea is increasingly relevant as the years go by. It seems to me that the UFO's may well represent a technology as far above human civilization as we are above the communities of jungle animals. Their observations of the earth might be likened to a zoological team observing zebras in the jungle. Again, a human being watching a UFO hover in the air may be in the position of a baboon watching a hovering helicopter. I strongly suspect that this is the case. But, whatever the reality behind the UFO's may be, I feel that our emergence into space must inevitably, at some time, bring us into contact with "minds that are to our minds as ours are to those of the beasts that perish," to quote again from Wells's own text. We must not refuse this challenge, but even so I am disturbed by the efforts now being made to signal other worlds. Years ago an unnamed space scientist was quoted as saying that, to certain alien races, we might be "the finest beef animals." He knew his H. G. Wells, and that his warning was unheeded is a reproach to the poor alertness of his colleagues.

In any case, the conquest of space and the UFO surveillance are the beginning of events which will broaden our horizons tremendously, whatever their final outcome. It is for this reason that every thinking person should study Wells's original idea and apply its significance and implications to our own time.

—WADE WELLMAN

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Although not a candidate for volume whatever of "Everybody's Favorite Christmas Stories," this is a superior example of a science fictional treatment of a religious theme. It concerns various levels of belief and what happens during a Christmas pageant in a lonely outpost on Rigel XIV. Barry Malzberg's latest sf book is THE EMPTY PEOPLE *(writing as "K. M. O'Donnell"), published by Lancer.*

THE FALCON AND THE FALCONEER

by Barry Malzberg

Depositions taken after the event:

ROMANO, CHAPLAIN: The ways of the Deity are imponderable; the more intricate and vast the universe becomes to us, the more imponderable they must be. This is the kind of thing which must be understood; it has taken me forty years to learn it, and I cannot emphasize sufficiently how basic the point is. There was a time, I understand, at the advent of institutionalized science and the emergence of the rational ethic, when it was thought that the further and further we went, the more we learned; the longer we voyaged, the more the mysteries would dissipate until finally, ultimately, there would be a time when knowledge outweighed mystery totally and everything was controlled. It was only within the last few centuries, I think, that we began to realize it worked the other way; that we learned only to play out our madness and insufficiency on a larger canvas; that space-drive and the colonization of the galaxy only meant that the uncontrollable had larger implications. At least, this is what I insist. Therefore, I feel no sense of guilt at what happened on Rigel XIV; it was not my responsibility. I did all that I could, of course, to discourage the disgusting adventure, but how much influence does a chaplain really have, particularly with men who have had almost to deny God to get where they are? I don't like this testimony any more than you like taking it, gentlemen, but one must face facts. In a difficult age,

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you must abandon preconception, posture, even hope, and do things in a difficult way. I have found this a life-sustaining rationalization.

Certainly I cautioned against it. I said to Williams the moment I heard about it and was able to gain access to him, "Captain Williams, I urge you to put an end to these plans. They are sacrilegious, they are abrupt, they are irrelevant, and they might even be actually dangerous. We should celebrate Christmas in the hallowed fashion, or we should not celebrate it at all, but we are not in any way directed to make a spectacle which can only be apostate. Besides, some of the more irreverent may be led to make remarks and come to conclusions which could only be justified under the circumstances. The idea of the creche is bad enough, but populating it with living figures is even more disgusting. Besides, the atmosphere here is absolutely intolerable, and the men will be forced to don heavy spacegear if the ceremony takes any time whatsoever. And the Rigellians, while certainly affecting creatures in their own way, are unfortunately not of an appearance or manner which should be included in any serious religious ceremony. Aside from all the jokes which have been made about their physical aspect, they smell badly and they have a foul sense of humor."

Williams didn't listen, of course. There was no way he could. By the time I had managed to secure an appointment with him—a chaplain, as you are finding out, has very low rank on these survey teams—it was only two hours before the ceremony. There was no time to cancel, even if he had been disposed to do so anyway, which he said he was not. He said my ideas were laughable. He said that I was looking at things in a totally didactic and sentimental fashion. He said that the men in this far-flung outpost needed their entertainment any way they could get it, sex to the contrary, and that the fact that they had wanted to have a Christmas pageant indicated that they might even be able to take something serious out of it, along with the other parts. He got up and paced excitedly and finished off a bottle of whiskey, which he said he was drinking in his quarters to celebrate the occasion, and then he threw me out, politely, saying that he had to get ready for the ceremony himself since he had been enlisted to play the part of a Pharisee, a very great honor. I came in without hope and I left without despair. There was nothing that I could do. To the best of my ability I had stated my warning. Beyond that it could not be my responsibility.

As to the grievous events which followed and which resulted in all

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of us being here, I have nothing to say about them. I could have predicted it. We voyage further and further into the darkness, only to see the universe cleave and shriek under us. Of course. Of course. I furnished what moderate spiritual counseling that I could, and as far as the ceremony itself is concerned, I saw nothing of it. All that happened I derived only at third hand. You need only take it up, then, with those that were there. Why bother me, anyway? I realize that you need a religious expert to make a deposition, but I simply cannot help you, gentlemen, I have my own problems.

HAWKINS, BOTANY TECHNICIAN: Well, I guess lucky is the word for it. It could have been me. I was originally scheduled to play the role, only I changed my mind at the last moment, and they slipped Cullings in. Boy, was I horrified when I saw what happened to Cullings! It was like everything that was going on was happening to me, only I wasn't there. I ended up with a small role, tending one of the donkeys, which was bad enough under all the circumstances.

The reason I backed out at the last moment was because of Dr. Romano, the team chaplain, and I really appreciate everything that he did for me now, although I wasn't happy about it then. Just when the rehearsals were beginning, Dr. Romano came up to me and said he wanted to talk to me when I got a chance, and because I didn't want to get in any trouble—he was an officer, after all—I went to his room later on and we chatted a bit. He said he knew from looking up my record that I came from a religious background and under all the circumstances he wanted to know how I got involved in something like this. I told him that the reason I had volunteered to play the Child was exactly *because* of this religious background of mine; I had always taken this seriously and had had a good upbringing, and taking the role I did was like I was making a contribution to what I believed in. But then Dr. Romano explained to me that it wasn't so much of a religious thing as an apostasy, he called it, because the thing was being done only for entertainment and spectacle and not because most of the people involved believed in it at all, and I began to understand what he was trying to say to me. He said that in any situation at any time you were going to find people who were going to play upon faith and use its appearance rather than its meaning for purposes of their own, but the thing the truly religious man learned to do was to recognize it and avoid it. *Fight it with all his heart's might,* Dr. Romano said, or something like that. So I backed

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right out of playing the role; I felt bad about it, of course, because they had already fitted the garments for me and arranged things my way, but knowing what a fool I had almost been taken for, it was a guaranteed thing I wasn't going to do it. I took one of those small, supporting roles instead, and they slotted Cullings in because he was kind of the same size as I was and they didn't have to make too many changes. Actually, Cullings was happy to do it; the way it worked out it was a kind of an honor to play that role, which was another one of the reasons I was unhappy. But when I saw the way it worked out, I started being grateful, and I haven't stopped being grateful to this day.

No, of course I didn't understand what was going on there. What was there to understand? Who could know? How could it get over to us? It was just a game, a kind of game we were playing in that damned place because were were so bored and the natives there were so anxious to please and because Christmas was coming on. If it happened to me in some other way in some other place, I still wouldn't know what was going on. But it won't happen because I'm getting out of the service; my enlistment would have been up a week ago if it hadn't been for this hearing; and no matter what you do to us, I'm never going out there again. Even if I'm kept somewhere for thirty years. Because you reach a point when you finally reach a point, you know what I mean? I didn't know Cullings well at all; he was just a guy. There were a lot of us out there, you know; it was like a good-sized town and everybody had their own jobs and fitted in with the people who were working around them. I was sure sorry to see what happened, though.

XCBNMJY, NATIVE: The trumpet shall sound and the dead shall be raised incorruptible for behold I tell you a mystery we do not sleep but we shall all be changed in a moment in the twinkling of an eye at the last trumpet (transcript becomes illegible).

WILLIAMS, COMMANDER: I'll tell this as simply and straightforwardly as possible, and then I'll have nothing more to say. I think that a court of inquiry has been called on this sad incident is disgraceful. There is absolutely no reason for it, and were it not for the fact that certain elements of the bureaucracy felt their own positions to be obscurely threatened by the events, this never would have occurred. They're merely trying to hang us so they won't be touched. I was always a straightforward man, and I speak the truth. This is one of the hazards of command. What do those

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hacks and clerks know of responsibility?

Sure, I okayed the pageant. Rigel XIV is a dismal outpost, one of the worst assignments in the survey corps. The terrain is lousy; the view is impossible; the climate is intolerable; and to top it all off, the atmosphere, which seems perfectly benign on first exposure, turns out to kill you if you're exposed to it for more than thirty minutes. That was found out by trial-and-error, of course, a long time ago.

It's a lousy detail and the best types don't generally end up there; most of us didn't have a connection of any sort, or we wouldn't have been on the post in the first place. In my case, they were out to nail me for that mess on Deneb X years ago, where they still think I was responsible for the survey missing the uranium deposits. There's no truth in that at all, but they've been after me ever since.

The only saving grace of the assignment is the natives. Friendly little beasts; stupid as hell, of course, and almost ineducable, but cooperative. They can learn the language after a fashion, and they can be taught to perform simple tasks, but I do not believe that this in itself indicates human intelligence. Too, they look like asses, and it may just be my xenophobia, but nothing that looks like an ass can earn my respect.

But they're pleasant creatures, they make ideal pets, and even a man in the heaviest gear can ride on them for hours. They have an amazing tolerance and they're curious as hell in the bargain, so one way or the other I guess that you could say that it is possible to establish some kind of a relationship with them. I don't want to get into this business of telepathy at all; I know that it's being discussed here, along with all those other mysterious powers they're supposed to have. I never saw any evidence of it, and I should know. And the whole history of the survey, which I know as well as anyone, shows that there's never been any trouble between them and us. They just function on their own level.

I heard about the idea of the pageant only when it was presented to me by a group of the men. Hawkins, one of the botany detail, was the spokesman, more or less, which I found surprising because Hawkins has always struck me as a kind of nonentity, one of those civil servants who make up the bulk of these teams, doing their jobs with all the efficiency and imagination they might possess if they were working in a huge bureau back here. I suppose certain things are timeless after all, but Hawkins was really enthused. I had never seen so much life in the man.

"We want to have a Christmas

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pageant," he said. "We can build a creche right outside, and the men will take the various roles, and the Rigellians can be the donkeys in the manger and the sheep on the fields. The idea is to re-enact the Nativity and give us all something to think about in our pasts or back home. We want your permission to go ahead and build the creche."

"I don't understand," I said, which I truly didn't. "Do you mean to say that you're going to assign the various roles of the story to people in the crew and just go through with this thing outside, in that terrain?"

"Exactly. We all kind of worked it out on our own, the engineers and the science detail. We think something should be done for Christmas. We didn't always live out here, you know."

"But what's the point? Why all the enthusiasm?" and indeed, Hawkins and the others were trembling with interest; I had never seen the men so involved. "And what's the point of it?"

"It's kind of a tribute to our history. To what we are as men and where we used to be and what we once wanted to believe and where we are going. It's a reconstitution of myth within a contemporary framework, an infusion of dreams into the reality so that in the blending the two, dreams and reality, must be known together."

"That's a strange way to talk," I said. "I don't believe I've ever heard you talk like that before."

"We kind of worked it out beforehand," Hawkins said and looked at the floor. "Is it all right? Can we go ahead and do it then?"

"I don't even know if you need my permission. This would come under recreation which you are permitted on your respective schedules. I suppose it would take place inside the project?"

"Well, no. We wanted to go outside. There's a nice depression, only a few hundred yards from here where the creche can be set up, and we kind of thought that it should be in the open air. I can't explain why, but it seemed nicer that way."

"And these roles? You've already selected the people to play them? Won't there be some embarrassment about—uh—some of the assignments?"

"I'm going to play the Infant," Hawkins said. "And the others will fall into place." He pointed to the three who had come with him. "They're going to be the wise men, of course."

Of course. Well, I had no objection. I told him so. It wasn't my place to comment on it one way or the other; a commander's duties are very strictly outlined under the general code, and they do not involve intermingling with the crew on projects or recreation of their own choice which does not

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interfere with duty. The idea struck me as being a little strange, of course, immature and a bit preposterous, but as far as I was concerned, that was none of my business.

"You can have your pageant," I said. "I wouldn't advise abusing the natives, though, in the performance."

"Oh, not at all," Hawkins said. "They're kind of the key to the whole thing. The pastoral element and so on. We'll treat them very carefully. Actually, they're quite excited about the idea. It will enable them to know us better."

That's as far as I went with it. It sounded a little crazy, of course, but men tend to get crazy on these expeditions anyway; it's a kind of fringe benefit. I know some who have invented variations of chess and others who have papered their barracks, ceiling to floor, wall to wall, with pictures of various anatomical parts; I know more than a couple who progressed from serious alcoholism to madness during a run. This is what is going to happen inevitably when you set out to colonize the universe: men have to do it, men have to occupy it, and men are going to bring what they are along with them. The idea of having a pageant was no more insane than my conviction, during my second tour of duty on Campa I, that I was regressing to an ape-like state due to boredom and would be able to write the first logical autobiography of a subhuman species. You have to go along with this kind of thing.

When I learned that Hawkins had bowed out and Cullings had stepped in, it was of no interest to me; and when I was invited and went, it was only a way of showing the men respect and killing a couple of hours. I didn't like what happened, of course, and in a general human way I feel kind of responsible, but there was no way that we could know. How could anybody know? Besides, in the long run, it probably won't make any difference anyway. Cullings, I understand from people who knew him, was a sullen, nonreligious type; maybe the experience will do him some good. On the other hand, I don't like this kind of inquiry, and I have nothing more to say.

STOCK, PSYCHOLOGIST: There is a perfectly rational explanation for what happened, but you will not obtain it from many of the others, particularly not from Williams, whom I diagnosed early on as a rigid, repressed, anal-oriented paranoid whose fantasies were an enactment and rationalization of his basic, latent homosexuality. Of course, my job is to deal more with alien psychology and social relationships, but that doesn't prevent me from making judgments.

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You have to do something to keep the intellect alive, after all: these aliens—most of those I've encountered and particularly the bastards on the Rigel survey—are little better than vegetables, and there's hardly much stimulation in working out group patterns and social interaction on a survey team because anybody who's on these is half-crazy in the first place and then they proceed to get crazier. By the time I got wind of the pageant and the way it was going, it was my best opinion that Cullings, Hawkins and the whole batch of them had regressed to a subinfantile state where they were using magic and mysticism as a way of warding off any kind of threat; they were even below the polymorphous perverse stage. I could catch that right away by the peculiar details of the pageant which they insisted upon—the relationship of the Madonna and child in the feeding position, the way that the aliens were grouped just around, the use of special straw for the creche . . . all of this was sheer compulsiveness. And the fact that a big, hulking man like Forrest was playing the role of the Madonna with little Cullings added another element to it. The implications were fascinating; it was the first truly interesting thing that had happened to me since I signed up for this cursed project. But then again it could get a thoughtful man scared.

Several things scared me: in the first place, as I began to make my investigations, then quietly checking here and there, I found that nobody would really own up to having originated the idea of the pageant. "It just kind of came up one day and we got to work on it" was what I heard time and again, or "a lot of us just realized that it would be a honey of an idea." The sudden imposition of a mass-obsession without clear, individual origin is one of the surest indications that something is going on. I didn't like it.

I'm aware that it's been brought up now that the idea might have originated with the aliens who were using their telepathic ability to plant it in the crew so subtly that the crew thought it came out of their own heads. It would be a good explanation, but it doesn't make a pack of sense: these aliens are idiots in every possible regard; they are animaline not only in appearance but in behavior, and the fact that they have a low mimetic ability and are thus able to simulate language is no clue whatsoever to intelligence. No, the men got this up on their very own—mass-psychosis if it ever happened—and what happened to Cullings was totally their responsibility.

When you take a group of hacks, boobs, oafs and civil servants, set them up on a bleak outpost somewhere near the center

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of hell—otherwise to be known as the outer arm of the Milky Way —leave them to their own devices sans sex, sans organized recreation, sans the inner resources to make things come out their own way, and when this group of men ends up raving religious fanatics who perform a strange rite out of which comes death, disappearance and madness . . . what other explanation do you need? It is not so much that I am an excessively rational man . . . but after all, how far afield does one have to go? The simplest explanation is the right one; I learned that a long time ago. The simplest explanation is the right one here. I will not cooperate with this inquiry any further, and I care little what happens to me as a result of it.

MARTINSON, CREW: Well, I'll give you a simple account, as best as I can remember. I don't know why you're asking me; all those other guys who testified would be much better able to do it than me. I'm just a simple athlete. Haven't you heard? I'll just stick to the facts. The rehearsals went pretty well, although the time when Cullings and Hawkins switched roles set us back a little. The whole point was not to make a mockery of it. I was playing one of the people in the inn; I had only one line which was after the innkeeper said no room I was supposed to get up and say "but what of the child?" Just that, "but what of the child?" It was the key to the whole scene, but there was so much else going on that nobody listened.

The aliens worked into it just great. They not only played the animals, there were plenty left over to be in the tavern as well. There was nothing peculiar about them playing human roles; we just took it for granted. They really worked into it and they were good actors, too.

So, the night we did it, it went just like the rehearsals, all the way up to the end, when things changed a little. What we were supposed to do, as I recall, was simply to group around Cullings and look at him, and then the floodlights that we had set up would be switched off, and that would be the end of the thing. Cullings looked very peaceful; he took the role seriously. All during rehearsals, as soon as he stepped in, he was saying that he felt for the first time as if he had truly discovered himself. Recovered himself? Maybe; I forget.

But when the lights were supposed to go on out, they didn't. I have no idea what happened; maybe somebody at the controls wasn't there. Anyway, the lights just kept on glaring and there were the whole bunch of us, standing on the straw, most of us in robes and some of us sitting up on the Rigellians.

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The words? Yeah. You want to know those. I don't know who it came from, one of the donkeys, maybe mine, maybe another, and they said *Thou Art My Own Beloved Son; I beckon unto thee and we art conjoined forever.* That was all. The voice sounded pleased.

Cullings . . . he began to shake.

He shook and shook and then he was drooling and slobbering and crying. It wasn't like the rehearsals at all; it was as if he was having a fit or something, and he began to scream things like "I see, I see" and "what is going on here?" and "the thieves, they double-crossed me!" and it didn't sound like his voice at all, it was so strained and high-pitched. Then he started to throw himself around on the straw. Like epilepsy. Only more interesting.

The whole bunch of us were just so stunned that we didn't even go in to pick him up or try to help him. We just stared. It was kind of frightening because we hadn't counted on it, you see; we were just going to shut off the lights and go back to the ship and have a few drinks. And sing the old carols. All of a sudden, we have a situation. He was twiching and jerking like mad, Cullings; it was like he was trying to stand up but he simply couldn't make it. He would get to his knees and then it would happen again.

And then, of course, he said those words.

Well, of course, I was upset. Cullings wasn't exactly a close friend, but I knew him and when you live in close quarters with a guy, you tend to get involved. I was very sorry to see what had happened to him, but there just wasn't a damned thing I could do. There wasn't a damned thing anyone could do; we just stood there like a pack of fools. And the asses. After a while, when we realized that it was over and yet it wasn't going to stop, someone said that we might as well get back to the ship and have a few drinks anyway. Nobody wanted to touch Cullings, although someone suggested we drag him over there. We just couldn't bear to. So we left him there surrounded by the donkeys and we went back. Midway into the ship we saw the floodlights get cut, and then we went inside and got really stoned. All that I know is that Captain Williams said we should all leave the planet immediately, and that was some operation, you can imagine, with over half of us staggering drunk, trying to work on the ship. But we got it off, and we got back here in good shape, and then all of a sudden we found ourselves with this court of inquiry and like that. I don't know what's going on. I have great sympathy for Cullings, though. I sometimes think about

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what he must be doing now. If anything. But I try not to think about these things at all.

PETERS, FIRST SECRETARY: I think that the evidence, based upon what we have heard and upon the "statement" of the alien is pretty conclusive. Incidentally, that alien is going to die if we don't get him back there soon. We cannot simulate their environment; there are things about it we don't understand.

It is really conclusive, and I don't think there's much point in going on further. Our decision to make is simple: do we go back to Rigel XIV or don't we? Since I can see no basis for our returning other than to re-enact a continuing madness, I think we should stay out.

I think we should stay out of a lot of places, I really do. There are forces in this universe which we are not meant to understand, and our attempts to make them conform to our vision of rationality can only make us cosmic clowns to far more than the Rigellians if we keep this up. I think that the Bureau will carefully have to review all of its procedures and policies now and that we are in for a period of regrouping and terrible reappraisal.

As for what may happen in the decades to come, this is something that we cannot possibly ascertain. Whatever happens, it is something that we will have to live with. I can only trust that religiosity for them, as it was for us, proves to be a localized phenomenon.

And I call upon the mercy of this court; I do not think that charges should be filed against the deponents. What did they know? What do we know? In similar circumstances, we would have done the same. We are that kind of people. Give them desk jobs and let them alone.

We cannot make a Civil Service adjunct of the universe. I think that this, at least, is pretty clear.

LAST WORDS OF CULLINGS, ABSENT: *My God, my God, 32 years to go—*

But I'd rather be getting crocked at the Inn!

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The commercial assault on the senses has come a long way since Mike Todd, Jr.'s smell-o-vision (which, as we recall, lasted for only one movie, a strange and silly olfactory chase film with Peter Lorre). The old sf favorite, the feelie, is not yet available, but various off-beat clubs and the theatre of participation offer something pretty close. What's the next step? Read on.

LORD OF SENSATION

by Leonard Tushnet

JOE ROLAND WAS A MODEST man. He disclaimed any great genius as the cause of his phenomenal success. "I merely saw the trend and I capitalized on it," he said. "After all, I grew up in the generation that did its homework to the tune of rock-and-roll. And don't forget—more than half the population is now under thirty and the percentage of young people increases by leaps and bounds."

But a genius he nevertheless was, if a genius is one who builds the germ of an idea into an overwhelming craze. After graduating from M.I.T., instead of going into a very safe and highly paid job as a biologic engineer, for which he was trained, Joe borrowed money from everyone in his family to start a business of his own. He set up a small laboratory on Canal Street and then prowled the cafes and basement coffee houses of MacDougal and Bleecker Streets in Greenwich Village until he found a combo and a singer that pleased him. The Murderers, who had cut only two records, neither one a success, were willing to cooperate.

Joe revamped the Moog synthesizer. He rewired the electric guitar, the vibraphone, and the drums, and made mysterious alterations in the amplifier. A month later he knew he had

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made it. The Murderers moved from the dingy Sour Grapes to the larger, more prestigious quarters of the Spotted Dog, and Joe took out his first patent. He also became a majority stockholder in the newly incorporated and very grateful Murderers, an idealistic group whose motto was "Poetics, not Politics."

Their music was loud, louder than any group had dared to use before, and it had another quality. It vibrated. It sent waves through the young people who flocked nightly to crowd the Spotted Dog. The Murderers became more popular than the Beatles but without the Beatles' charisma. No girls shrieked when they appeared; no boys imitated their dress. It was the sound that sent them, the sound alone. And the sound lost none of its quality when it was recorded or taped.

Asked why the Murderers turned them on so much, the youngsters were vague and inarticulate: "I dunno . . . It's just groovy, that's all . . . The sound gets into you . . . It's like it's my own thing . . . It's where I'm at . . . . I feel all good inside, you know, when I hear it . . . I can't explain. I just dig it . . . It's almost like smoking grass, I get so high . . . It does something to me. It's like I'm with it. . . ."

Joe was less emotional than the kids. "There's a simple explanation. Music is not homogeneous sound. It consists of harmonics, overtones, sound waves that vary subtly in amplitude and frequency. Add tempo and decibel changes as additional variables and you get dead marches, martial airs, Phrygian modes, popular songs. What I've done is to use new techniques that add still another factor—ultrasonic vibration, waves that are unheard (like a dog whistle) but that nevertheless have an effect on the auditory apparatus."

That effect seemed to be confined to adolescents. Those unfortunate adults exposed to the fortissimo sounds and the wholly unintelligible words fled the room. Not so their children. They jerked and gyrated, their faces blank with ecstasy.

After the second golden platter was cut, the family loans were repaid with handsome bonuses. Now totally independent, Joe, against the advice of his lawyers and over the howls of the Murderers corrupted by the fleshpots of Egypt, gave out licenses to other groups for the use of his devices. The Murderers no longer had a monopoly. "I know what I'm doing," Joe said. "There's a limit to this operation. These kids'll grow up and away from the sound as their auditory apparatus matures. The youngsters coming up now will have heard it so often they'll be immunized, so to speak, against it."

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The money rolled in. Joe paid no attention to the protests of parents, educators, and music critics that he was tampering with a delicate adolescent balance, that he was encouraging a premature response to sensual stimulation, and that he was weaning the younger generation away from classical music. He could not ignore, however, the rising clamor from the physiologists. They reported that the surveys of young people addicted to pop-rock, folk-rock, and rock-and-roll showed damage to hearing; a large number had actual hearing loss. Worse for Joe, several teams of investigators found permanent injury to the organ of Corti in those youngsters who favored the groups using Joe's devices. A series of public health ordinances promptly followed the publication of the reports. The devices were banned.

Joe shrugged, looked at his bankbook and at the teenage scene, and went back to his laboratory. The Spotted Dog (which he now owned) and Wendy's (an uptown discotheque, also his) introduced a new strobe light. The colors no longer shifted in more or less random patterns; they were synchronized with the beat and were reflected back and forth from the slightly concave-mirrored walls. The kaleidoscope of colors cast by the hidden projectors was pretty; the effect was spectacular. The dancers moved in a dreamlike trance and walked out at closing time glassy-eyed and dazed. To the Spotted Dog and Wendy's, Joe added the Heavenly Lites and the Aurora Borealis, both specializing in what he called "photodances." The teen-agers spread the word, "It's like a mind-blowing trip." Joe raised the admission prices to his places and happily counted the receipts.

He could not patent his method, however, and soon every youth rendezvous put on photodances. Those of the Coruscators in San Francisco and the Illuminati in Pittsburgh were the most famous. Joe claimed to be the originator of the idea and started suits against them to try to collect license fees, but the courts held against him. By the time he was finished with the legal battles, the strobe fad had run its course, and the American Ophthalmologic Congress belatedly decried the deleterious effects of the light on the optical systems of juveniles.

"They can't do a thing to you," Joe's lawyers told him when he was sued by several irate parents because their darlings now needed eyeglasses for utility, not fashion. "You're lucky your demands were held invalid."

Joe took off for a prolonged honeymoon with Miranda, one of the original Murderers. The

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couple traveled across the country and then spent some time in England. Miranda gave Joe his next inspiration. "Ears, sight—why not taste and smell?" she asked. "There can't be any harm in stimulating those senses. The kids always look for something new."

"Spray the air with perfume?" Joe shook his head. "Let chocolate soda drop like the gentle dew from heaven? It's too banal. It won't work. And it's not patentable." But Joe was restless. Compound interest was not enough for him. He wanted capital gains, and quick. He sat down and took thought, which, although it added no cubits to his stature, in a short time multiplied his fortune.

Joe invented (and patented) a novel dance device. Introduced in a converted mission in the East Village and advertised in the underground press as the way-outest, the Whirling Dervish was an immediate success. The dance floor, dimly lit by gas jets inside clear glass globes, was mounted on a turntable with varying speeds of revolution; from tiny apertures in the walls came intermittent air-streams scented with pine, peppermint, and lilac; at irregular intervals from above floated down a fine aerosol mist flavored with vanilla and strawberry. The combined stimulation of mild vertigo, pleasant odors and tastes, flickering lights, and rock rhythm induced a mild, relaxed, semi-hypnotic euphoric state. Labor costs were cheap; rock groups were even willing to pay for the privilege of appearing at the Whirling Dervish.

"The Whirling Dervish is the absolute end!" raved the pulp rock magazines. "A new and extended sensation that must be experienced to be believed!" editorialized the slicks that catered to the college crowd. And *Subterranea,* the high school handsheet, ran out of obscenities in describing the Nirvana joys of the Whirling Dervish.

St. Mark's Place had to be closed to traffic because of the crowds that jammed the street nightly, willing to pay any price to get into a session at the Whirling Dervish. Joe was visited first by a sober delegation of entrepreneurs and then by a flashy representative of the Mafia; both wanted a piece of the action or at least franchises to open Whirling Dervishes in other cities. Joe had no trouble with them; he reminded them that the physiologic effects on the youth had not yet been studied and that killjoy bluenose doctors abounded and that his previous experience with such characters had not been happy. The potential investors left in a hurry; they wanted a sure thing, not speculation.

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Joe himself wanted to take no chances before he expanded his operation. He gave a grant (tax-deductible, of course) to an Ivy League university to study what happened to the devotees of the Whirling Dervish. The preliminary reports were amazing, and he promptly authorized their publication. The physicians said that no harmful effects were noted unless a loss of appetite for sweets was harmful. The psychiatrists stated that the post-Whirling Dervish zombie state lasted only an hour after the session and that thereafter the youngsters were affable and nonaggressive; indeed, a general improvement in social attitude took place, manifested by fewer arguments with parents, more docility in school, and greater respect for authority figures. The sociologists' conclusions from their survey were the kicker: Teen-age drunkenness disappeared. Users of marijuana, speed, and barbiturates cut down their doses, and the more frequently they went to the Whirling Dervish, the less they resorted to drugs until eventually they stopped altogether. Furthermore, the Whirling Dervish syndrome apparently acted as a sex-surrogate; teen-age marriages and illegitimate births were almost unheard of in Whirling Dervish enthusiasts.

He quickly proceeded to franchise Whirling Dervishes in every large city. The research team's reports effectively undercut any opposition from the older generation. Fathers bellowed about the expense; teachers grumbled about low grades; record shops bewailed their loss of business. But who dared openly to criticize such a socially beneficent enterprise as the Whirling Dervish? In a year Whirling Dervish spots covered the country and Joe was a millionaire many times over.

Then he retired. He set up a public corporation, Amusement Unlimited, which bought the patent rights from him for an enormous sum and which became the battleground for the gamblers on Wall Street and the legitimate front men of the underworld. The stock rose faster than Xerox or Polaroid. At its peak Joe sold on the market every share he owned and took a much needed vacation with Miranda and his two children. He went to an undisclosed location (some said Alaska, some said Nigeria, a few finger-to-nose knowing ones said Irvington, New Jersey, for who would look for him in Irvington, New Jersey?) and lived the quiet life of a retired paterfamilias until the storm blew over.

The storm came (and with it the closing of the Whirling Dervishes and the bankruptcy of Amusement Unlimited) when a

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couple of bright young men dug up and published the final reports of the research team deposited in the archives of the university. The findings of the preliminary reports were not disputed but shocking additions, based on more extended study, were made: Physicians announced a rapid increase in malnutrition and vitamin deficiency diseases in Whirling Dervish fans; psychiatrists noted failure of emotional maturation, sometimes regression to an infantile psychological state shown by overeagerness to conform to Establishment mores and by lack of spontaneous initiative. Paradoxically, along with that, sociologists discovered increasing social alienation, a peculiar form of anomie, in which the youngster was willing to give up societal norms (like bathing, family visiting, social contacts) if he or she could spend hours at the Whirling Dervish. The team members unanimously concluded that the Whirling Dervish habit was as bad as the opium habit in its effects.

Joe comforted Miranda when she wept after reading the story in the papers. "It's not so bad, honey," he said. "No permanent damage was done to the kids. As a matter of fact, good came out of it. The gangsters and the promoters got their fingers burned. Parents won't go along with teenage fads so easily now. They'll watch more carefully what their children do and where they go. Public health authorities will be on their toes. Government, not private enterprise, will finance research on the problems of adolescence. Not enough is known about the effect of tight pants on boys, for instance, or ironing the hair on girls. All's turned out for the best."

Joe listened to himself. He resolved never to go into any future undertaking without long preliminary studies on its possible far-reaching effects. He was basically an honest man obsessed with the Puritan ethic. Monetary success was proof of God's approval; idleness was of the Devil. Joe became increasingly ashamed of doing nothing.

"I don't mind going to the park or the zoo or museums with the kids," he told Miranda, "or seeing plays or listening to concerts or traveling. But sooner or later all that gets boring. A man has to do something in this world. He just can't sit around in the sun. That's for old men—and bums."

To keep Joe busy, Miranda suggested that he set up a fully equipped electronics laboratory to play around in. Joe was not a player. He got to work. Work in the field in which he felt himself to be an expert—that of sensory stimulation. He read textbooks

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on medicine, psychology, and physiology. He restudied his physics. He searched through technical journals.

At last he had an idea, a basis on which to start experiments. First, he built a one-room building at the far end of the Long Island estate he now owned. Then he installed powerful electromagnets in each of the four walls. He recruited biologists, physicists, and psychologists and supervised their work on the animals he kept in the building. He started with hamsters, then white rats, then pigs, and ended up with a rhesus monkey house.

Satisfied after two years that his idea was practicable, he got rid of all the animals, converted the building into a simulated dining room complete with fixtures, tables, and special dinnerware. Attached to the first building he constructed a restaurant kitchen, a bar, and a larder. He hired a bartender, a short-order cook, and a busboy. He advertised for volunteers, men and women over twenty-five, preferably couples, to eat one meal a day in the laboratory-restaurant and to be subjects for his research team.

Joe had profited (not only financially) by his former experiences. This was going to be no trial-and-error job. He had planned every step of the testing. His painstaking efforts bore fruit. In a month he knew he had succeeded. Every volunteer gained weight and didn't care that he did. Man and woman, they came away from their dinners exclaiming about the quality of the cocktails served and about the culinary masterpieces they had partaken of. Joe smiled to himself when they sadly said good-bye at the end of the experiment. The hard liquor and wines he had offered were the cheapest he could buy; the cook, no *cordon bleu* to start with, did the best he could with the third-rate provisions on hand.

"Nothing to worry about," Joe assured Miranda, who still remembered the social consciousness with which the Murderers had started. "No patents, no licenses, no franchises. Just a chain of restaurants serving good food. I put a lot of money into this, but we'll make it all up and more in no time." Miranda wanted to believe Joe, whom she loved, but she wondered why she and the children never had a meal in the laboratory-restaurant.

Joe bought a building in the fashionable Fifties near Madison Avenue. He converted the ground floor into an intimate eating place. He supervised the installation of the electromagnets behind the walls of the dining area and then let a firm of chi-chi decorators do what they thought would please a select clientele. He bribed away the

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maitre d'hotel from a famous French restaurant and employed a staff of expert waiters and busboys. He hired a manager, a man who tore his hair out at the inexplicable actions of his boss.

He expostulated, "Why do you spend so much money setting up this place and then want me to order the cheapest meat and the lowest quality of vegetables? And you got a chef from a Bowery employment agency! The only place he ever worked in was a greasy spoon diner! And those undercooks! They don't know how to boil water! And your menu, if you can call it that! Four items! Even in French hamburgers are hamburgers and ice cream is ice cream! You won't last a day! And your idiotic rules for customers! I never heard the like! If you hadn't guaranteed me a year's wages, I'd quit right now!"

Joe said soothingly, "Wait. You'll see." The public relations firm he engaged got to work with its notes planted in the gossip columns about the great new restaurant about to open. Invitations were sent out to all the professional gourmet writers and to a small number of glamour personalities to attend "a novel epicurean experience."

The manager hid in his office opening night. The maitre d' swallowed hard and put on a bold face. The waiters calculated where they could get new jobs. The guests snickered and then openly laughed when the checkroom attendant pointed out the sign: "Please check your wristwatches and other timepieces. The management is not responsible for damage during period of service."

They came to jeer and left to praise. Keith Kermit of the *Times* wrote next day: "The decor of L'Aimant is interesting but not unusual. The chinaware is extraordinarily heavy, and the knives and forks rather cheap looking. But the food is divine! Not three but six stars are necessary to characterize L'Aimant, a place on a par with—no, far superior to—any of the vaunted Parisian restaurants. The menu is limited, but who cares? The Gods on Olympus dined on only nectar and ambrosia, and that is what is served at L'Aimant." Celestine Battlemore flatly stated, "I have never eaten in any restaurant in the whole world a meal better than that I ate last night at L'Aimant." Diana Kovacs and Juliet Kind gave special interviews, vying with each other in their rave descriptions of the cuisine. The *bons vivants* were unanimous in their agreement that New York would become the Mecca for gastronomes just because of L'Aimant.

The staff huddled together in disbelief over the newspapers.

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They could not understand. "Payoff!" sneered a waiter. "Blackmail. He must have something on these people," said another. "He slipped dope in the cocktails," said still another.

Joe came early that night and took the manager into his confidence. "I am going to double your salary and give you a percentage of the profits," he said, and before the other could recover from the surprise, went on, "because from now on you run the place. And if this one goes well, I plan to open other restaurants like it all over the country. You will be the general manager if you keep your mouth shut and hire discreet subordinates."

He took the manager down to the locked basement and showed him the controls for the electromagnets. "Start them up a half hour before opening time." He explained the reason for the blue dinner service, the special iron-and-nickel alloy eating utensils, and the medallion on a chain every guest was given to wear when he was seated. "Briefly, every time a guest moves he induces an electric current in himself. The medallion, the alloy in the forks and knives, the cobalt in the china all intensify the current. What he eats or drinks makes no difference. His gustatory and olfactory sensations are heightened in the direction of maximum satisfaction. We don't need fancy dishes or extensive menus to please our customers. All we have to do is fill them up. That's why we serve only lettuce salad, hamburgers, French fried potatoes, and ice cream. From now on our *prix fixe* will be $25 per guest, and that will not include a prepared cocktail and *vin ordinaire* with the meal. Now it's up to you to make L'Aimant a success."

The manager gulped. "I'll try to. But there's one thing I'm curious about. Why did you name the restaurant 'The Loving One'?"

"Not 'The Loving One'," Joe laughed. "L'Aimant. French for The Magnet."

The manager had no regrets. L'Aimant became *the* place to go. Reservations were made months in advance. Its fame spread to France; a special inspector for the *Guide Michelin* came over, and when his glowing report was cabled to the home office in Paris, his superiors were sure he had been suborned. Another inspector was sent to check; his report was equally enthusiastic. The Bureau of Tourism suppressed both reports, but the word got out anyway.

Joe kept his word to the manager. He opened a chain of restaurants: L'Aimant de Chicago, L'Aimant de New Orleans, L'Aimant de Los Angeles, and a dozen others.

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No one complained about the constant hum in the dining room or about the absence of music. No one objected to wearing the heavy chain and medallion. No one murmured against the NO CHILDREN rule. Everyone ate the soggy lettuce in peanut oil and white vinegar, the greasy hamburgers, the half-done potatoes, and the artificially flavored ice cream, and only sighed that they could not eat more often at L'Aimant. Top executives and other expense-accountniks persuaded the managers to open for lunch as well as for dinner. The menu was the same. The income from the L'Aimant chain rose steadily.

Miranda was unconvinced by Joe's argument that he was performing a public service by making people happy with his meals. "I can't tell you why. I just feel it in my bones that it's morally wrong to fool someone into thinking he's had a Lucullan feast when he could have had the same food at a drive-in stand. It's like getting money under false pretenses."

Joe was impatient with Miranda. "Tell me," he asked, "what would be wrong if a guy slept with a five-dollar hooker and thought he was with Cleopatra all the time? This is the same, only it's food, not sex." Miranda dropped the subject.

The conversation gave Joe another idea. He was restless again. The money kept pouring in but Joe wasn't interested in money alone. He had enough. He had the scientific itch. He wanted to try something new with the electromagnets.

Without telling Miranda he bought an empty warehouse on Second Avenue, just where the luxury apartments were creeping up on the tenements. He put in his electromagnets and got a large supply of heavier and longer chains with bigger medallions. He let it be quietly known that he was up to something really dramatic, a discothèque for the over-fifty crowd, even for senior citizens. Joe theorized: if the electromagnetically induced current increases sensory stimulation of the olfactory and digestive systems, then why not of the genital system? Even if the effect were transitory, even if the grand passion of youth were not revived, if the man thought it was, that would be sufficient.

As a public-spirited individual (also to establish a tax loss and to safeguard himself legally), Joe charged no admission to the discothèque, which he called the Ponce de Leon. The innuendo was obvious and alluring. Unlike other discothèques, the decoration was at a minimum, the lights were steady and bright, and the disc jockey played only waltzes, rhumbas, fox trots, cha-chas, and

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an occasional merengue or tango. Only the men wore the chains; they were shamefaced, but carefully attached them like belts with the medallion looking like a codpiece.

Joe congratulated himself. Right again! And far better than he had expected. Besides the initial erotic stimulation there developed a two-day period of increased libido and performance. And this time he had wasted no time on preliminary research. He was pleased at the money he had saved.

Tears of gratitude in their eyes, men came up to the disc jockey or the ushers or the floor manager and pressed bills into their hands. The discothèque, originally scheduled to be open only on weekends, was opened nightly and even then had to turn away disappointed crowds.

Joe decided philanthropy had gone far enough. After two weeks, the admission charge was ten dollars for a two-hour session. Throngs still packed the Ponce de Leon.

Big Herbie, a notorious gangland satrap, visited the Ponce de Leon to check the possibilities of muscling in. He acted like a regular customer, staying the full two hours and dancing. A couple of days later he came back to see Joe. "I'm only sixty," he said, "but I was no good any more, if you know what I mean. But now, Mr. Roland, I'm like a kid sixteen. Any time you want a favor, let me know. Anybody bothers you, call me up right away. You oughta get the Noble prize or something."

Alas! While Joe was getting estimates on new Ponce de Leons in the other boroughs, the news began to trickle in. Joe had made a mistake in bypassing the preliminary research. Vigor and potency, even fertility, returned, it is true, to men with flagging powers. But then—almost like a cutoff, within six weeks they were back where they had started, sometimes worse, and they developed what the doctors called premature senility. Prostates enlarged, cataracts formed, bones became fragile, tremors and wrinkles and strokes were commonplace. Joe promptly closed up the Ponce de Leon.

Not fast enough. Big Herbie sent two of his henchmen to bring Joe to him. Big Herbie's jowls had shrunken, his spine was bent, his voice quavered. "A fella like you is a menace to society," he said. "A fella like you is like a guy giving horse to a baby just for the hell of it. A fella like you is only out after a buck and don't care what happens to poor suckers what fall for what you're selling. You got no social responsibility."

Joe tried to explain that physiology was not an exact sci-

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ence, that the biological effect of electromagnetically induced currents was a gray area, and that the discothèque was purely a well-meant experiment.

Big Herbie cut him short. The beady eyes glittered from their shrunken orbits. "That's just what I mean. Nobody's got a right to start something he don't know how it'll end. You deserves to be shot. Nobody'll miss you."

He was wrong. Miranda and the children did.

ISAAC ASIMOV

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THE LUXON WALL

by Isaac Asimov

YOU WOULDN'T THINK THIS ARTICLE-SERIES WOULD GET A MENtion in *Time*, would you?* Well, it did, and the particular article that was mentioned, some months ago, was IMPOSSIBLE, THAT'S ALL (February, 1967).

That article dealt with the impossibility of attaining or surpassing the velocity of light. After the article was published, there came to be a great deal of talk about faster-than-light particles, and suddenly I sounded like a fuddy-duddy left flat-footed by the advance of physics past the bounds I had mistakenly thought fixed.

At least that's the way *Time* made me sound. To make it even worse, they cited my good old friend, Arthur C. Clarke†, and his rebuttal entitled POSSIBLE, THAT'S ALL (October, 1968) in a way that sounded as though they thought Arthur more forward-looking than myself.

Fortunately, I am a tolerant man who is not disturbed by such things and I shrugged it off. When I next met Arthur, we were still the best of friends if you don't count the kick in the shin I gave him.

Anyway, I am *not* a fuddy-duddy, and I am now going to explain the situation in greater detail in order to prove it.

Let's begin with an equation that was first worked out by the Dutch physicist, Hendrik Antoon Lorentz, in the 1890's. Lorentz thought it applied specifically to electrically charged bodies, but Einstein later incorporated it into his Special Theory of Relativity, showing that it applied to all bodies, whether they carried an electric charge or not.

**Come to think of it, why not?*
†He's three years older than I am. I thought I'd just casually mention that.

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I will not present the Lorentz equation in its usual form but will make a small change for purposes that will eventually become clear. My version of the equation, then, is as follows:

$$m = k/\sqrt{1-(v/c)^2} \qquad \text{(Equation 1)}$$

In Equation 1, m represents the mass of the body under discussion, v is the velocity with which it is moving with respect to the observer, c is the velocity of light in a vacuum, and k is some value that is constant for the body in question.

Suppose, next, that the body is moving at one-tenth the velocity of light. That means $v = 0.1c$. In that case, the denominator of the fraction on the right-hand side of Equation 1 becomes $\sqrt{1-(0.1c/c)^2} = \sqrt{1-0.1^2} = \sqrt{1-0.01} = \sqrt{0.99} = 0.995$. Equation 1 therefore becomes $m = k/0.995 = 1.005k$.

We can make the same sort of evaluation for the case of the same body at gradually increasing velocities, say at velocities equal to $0.2c$, $0.3c$, $0.4c$ and so on. I won't bore you with the calculations but the results come out as follows:

velocity	*mass*
$0.1c$	$1.005k$
$0.2c$	$1.03k$
$0.3c$	$1.05k$
$0.4c$	$1.09k$
$0.5c$	$1.15k$
$0.6c$	$1.24k$
$0.7c$	$1.41k$
$0.8c$	$1.67k$
$0.9c$	$2.29k$

As you see, the Lorentz equation, if correct, would indicate that the mass of any object increases steadily (and, indeed, more and more rapidly) as its velocity increases. When this was first suggested, it seemed utterly against common sense because no such change in mass had ever been detected.

The reason for the non-detection, however, lay in the fact that the value of c was so huge by ordinary standards—186,281 miles per second. At a velocity of only one-tenth the speed of light, the mass of an object has increased to one-half of one percent more than its mass at, say, sixty miles per hour, and this increase would be easily detectable in principle. However, a velocity of "only" one-tenth the

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speed of light ($0.1c$) is still 18,628 miles per second or over 67 million miles per hour. In other words, to get measurable changes in mass, velocities must be attained which were completely outside the range of experience of the scientists of the 1890's.

A few years later, however, subatomic particles were detected speeding out of radioactive atomic nuclei and their velocities were sometimes considerable fractions of the velocity of light. Their masses could be measured quite accurately at different velocities, and the Lorentz equation was found to hold with great precision. In fact, down to this moment, no violation of the Lorentz equation has ever been discovered for any body at any measured velocity.

We must, therefore, accept the Lorentz equation as a true representation of that facet of the Universe which it describes—at least until further notice.

Now, accepting the Lorentz equation, let's ask ourselves some questions. First, what does k represent?

To answer that, let's consider a body (any body that possesses mass) that is at rest relative to the observer. In that case, its velocity is zero, and since $v = 0$, then $v/c = 0$ and $(v/c)^2 = 0$. What's more $\sqrt{1-(v/c)^2}$ is then $\sqrt{1-0}$ or $\sqrt{1}$ or 1.

This means that for a body at rest relative to the observer, the Lorentz equation becomes $m = k/1 = k$. We conclude then that k represents the mass of a body that is at rest relative to the observer. This is usually called the "rest-mass" and is symbolized as m_o. To write the Lorentz equation in the form it is usually seen, then, we have:

$$m = m_o/\sqrt{1-(v/c)^2} \qquad \text{(Equation 2)}$$

The next question is what happens if an object moves at velocities higher than the highest velocity given in the small table presented earlier in the article. Suppose the object moved at a velocity of $1.0c$ relative to an observer; if it moved at the velocity of light.

In that case the denominator of the Lorentz equation becomes $\sqrt{1-(1.0c/c)^2} = \sqrt{1-1^2} = \sqrt{1-1} = \sqrt{0} = 0$. For a body moving at the speed of light, the Lorentz equation becomes $m = m_o/0$ and if there is one thing we are not allowed to do in mathematics, it is to divide by zero. Mathematically, the Lorentz equation becomes meaningless for a body possessing mass that is moving at the velocity of light.

Well, then, let's sneak up on the velocity of light and not try to land right on it with a bang.

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As one increases the value of v, in Equation 2, past $0.9c$, while keeping it always *less* than $1.0c$, the value of the denominator steadily approaches zero and, as it does so, the value of m gets larger without limit. This is true no matter what the value of m_o so long as that value is greater than zero. (Try it for yourself, calculating m for values of v equal to $0.99c$, $0.999c$, and $0.9999c$ and so on for as long as you have patience.)

In mathematical language, we would say that in any fraction $c = a/b$, where a is greater than 0, then, as b approaches zero, c increases without limit. A shorthand way of saying this, and one that is frowned upon by strict mathematicians, is $a/0 = \infty$, where ∞ represents increase without limit or "infinity."

So we can say, then, that for any object possessing mass (however little), that mass approaches infinite values as its velocity approaches the velocity of light relative to the observer.

This means that the body cannot actually attain the velocity of light (though it can fall only infinitesimally short of that value) and certainly cannot surpass it. You can show this by either of two lines of argument.

The only way we know by which an ordinary mass-possessing object can be made to go at a greater velocity than it already possesses is to apply a force and therefore produce an acceleration*. The greater the mass, however, the smaller the acceleration produced by a given force and, therefore, as the mass approaches infinite values the acceleration which it can attain when subjected to any force, however great, approaches zero. Consequently, the object cannot be made to go faster than the velocity at which its mass becomes infinite.

The second line of argument is as follows: A moving body possesses kinetic energy equal to $mv^2/2$, where m is its mass and v is its velocity. If a force is applied to the body so that its kinetic energy is increased, that energy may be increased because v is increased, or because m is increased, or because both v and m are increased. At ordinary, everyday velocities, all the measurable increase goes into velocity, so we assume (wrongly) that mass remains constant under all conditions.

Actually, though, both velocity and mass are increased as the result of an applied force, but the mass so slightly at ordinary velocities as to make the change immeasurable. As the velocity relative to the observer increases, however, a larger and larger fraction of the added

*See ON THROWING A BALL, August 1969.

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energy produced by an applied force goes into increasing the mass and a smaller and smaller fraction into increasing the velocity. By the time the velocity is very close to that of light, virtually all the energy-increase appears in the form of an increase in mass; virtually none in the form of an increase in velocity. The change in emphasis is such that the final velocity can never attain, let alone exceed, the velocity of light.

—And don't ask why. That's the way the Universe is constructed.

I hope you notice, though, that when I was discussing the fact that mass becomes infinite at the speed of light, I am forced by the mathematical facts-of-life to say: "This is true no matter what the value of m_o so long as that value is greater than zero."

Of course, all the particles that build up ourselves and our devices —protons, electrons, neutrons, mesons, hyperons, etc., etc.—have rest-masses greater than zero so that the restriction doesn't seem very restrictive. In fact, people generally say "It is impossible to attain or surpass the velocity of light" without specifying that they mean for objects possessing rest-mass greater than zero because that seems to include virtually everything anyway.

I neglected to make the restriction myself in IMPOSSIBLE, THAT'S ALL which is what left me open to the fuddy-duddy implication. If we *include* the restriction, then everything I said in the article is perfectly valid.

Now let's go on and consider bodies with m_o *not* greater than zero.

Consider a photon, for instance, a "particle" of electromagnetic radiation—visible light, microwaves, gamma rays, etc.

What do we know about photons? In the first place, a photon always possesses finite energy so that its energy content is somewhere between 0 and ∞. Energy, as Einstein showed, is equivalent to mass according to a relationship which he expressed as $e = mc^2$. This means that any photon can be assigned a mass value which can be calculated by this equation and which will also fall somewhere between 0 and ∞.

Another thing we know about photons is that they move (relative to any observer) at the velocity of light. —Indeed, light has that velocity because it is made up of photons.

Now that we know these two things, let us convert Equation 2 into another but equivalent form:

$$m\sqrt{1 - (v/c)^2} = m_o \qquad \text{(Equation 3)}$$

For a photon, $v = c$, and by now you should see at once that

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this means that, for a photon, Equation 3 becomes:

$$m(0) = m_o \qquad \text{(Equation 4)}$$

If a photon were an ordinary mass-possessing object and were traveling at the velocity of light, its mass (m) would be infinite. Equation 4 would then become $\infty \times 0 = m_o$ and such an equation is not permitted in mathematics.

A photon, however, can be assigned a value for m which is between 0 and ∞, even though it is traveling at the velocity of light, and for *any* value between 0 and ∞ assigned to m, the value of m_o in Equation 4 turns out to equal 0.

This means that for photons, then, the rest-mass (m_o) equals zero. If the rest-mass is zero, in other words, an object *can* move at the velocity of light.

(This should dispose of the perennial question I am asked by correspondents who think they have discovered a flaw in Einstein's logic and say: "If anything moving at the velocity of light has infinite mass, how come photons don't have infinite mass?" The answer is that a distinction must be made between particles with a rest-mass of 0 and particles with a rest-mass greater than 0. But don't worry. Correspondents will continue to ask the question no matter how often I explain.)

But let's go farther. Suppose a photon traveled at a velocity *less* than that of light. In that case the quantity under the square root sign in Equation 3 would be greater than zero and this would be multiplied by m which itself possesses a value greater than zero. If two values, each greater than zero, are multiplied, then the product (in this case, m_o) must be greater than zero.

This means that if a photon traveled at less than the velocity of light (no matter how infinitesimally less), it would no longer have a rest-mass equal to zero. The same would be true if it traveled at more than the velocity of light, no matter how infinitesimally more. (Funny things happen to the equation at velocities greater than light, as we shall soon see, but one thing that the funniest cannot obscure is that the rest-mass would no longer be equal to zero.)

Physicists insist that a rest-mass must be constant for any given body, since all the phenomena they measure make sense only if this is so. In order for a photon's rest-mass to remain constant, then (that is, for it to remain always zero) the photon must *always* move at the velocity of light, not a hair less and not a hair more.

When a photon is formed, it *instantly*, with no measurable time

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lapse, begins moving away from the point of origin at 186,281 miles per second. This may sound paradoxical because it implies an infinite rate of acceleration and therefore an infinite force, but stop—

Newton's second law, connecting force, mass and acceleration, applies only to bodies with a rest-mass greater than zero. It does *not* apply to bodies with a rest-mass equal to zero.

Thus, if energy is poured into an ordinary body under ordinary circumstances, its velocity increases; if energy is subtracted, its velocity decreases. If energy is poured into a photon, its frequency (and mass) increases but its velocity remains unchanged; if energy is subtracted, its frequency (and mass) decreases, but its velocity remains unchanged.

But if all this is so, it seems to make poor logic to speak of "rest-mass" in connection with photons, for that implies the mass a photon would have if it were at rest—and a photon never can be at rest.

An alternate term has been suggested by O. M. Bilaniuk and E. C. G. Sudarshan.* This is "proper-mass." The proper-mass of an object would be a constant mass-value that is inherent in the body and is not dependent on velocity. In the case of ordinary bodies, this inherent mass is equal to that which can be measured when the body is at rest. In the case of photons it can be worked out by deduction, rather than by direct measurement.

A photon is not the only body that can and *must* travel at the velocity of light. Any body with a proper-mass of zero can and must do so. In addition to photons, there are no less than five different kinds of particles that are thought to have a proper-mass of zero.

One of these is the hypothetical graviton, which carries the gravitational force and which may, just this year of 1969, have finally been detected.

The other four are the various neutrinos: 1) the neutrino itself, 2) the antineutrino, 3) the muon-neutrino†, and 4) the muonantineutrino.

The graviton and all the neutrinos can and must travel at the velocity of light. Bilaniuk and Sudarshan suggest that all these velocity-of-light particles be lumped together as "luxons" (from the Latin word for "light").

All particles with a proper-mass greater than zero, which therefore cannot attain the velocity of light and must always and forever travel

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In an article entitled "Particles Beyond the Light Barrier," Physics Today, May, 1969, for those of you who wish I would give a reference now and then.
†See THE LAND OF MU, December 1965.

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at lesser velocities, they lump together as "tardyons." They further suggest that tardyons be said to travel always at "subluminal" ("slower-than-light") velocities.

But now what if we think of the unthinkable and consider particles at "superluminal" ("faster-than-light") velocities. This was done for the first time with strict adherence to relativistic principles (as opposed to mere science-fictional speculation) by Bilaniuk, Deshpande, and Sudarshan, in 1962, and such work hit the headlines at last when Gerald Feinberg published a similar discussion in 1967. (It was Feinberg's work which inspired the discussion in *Time*.)

Suppose a particle traveled at a velocity of $2c$; that is, at twice the velocity of light. In that case v/c would become $2c/c$ or 2 and $(v/c)^2$ would be 4. The term $\sqrt{1-(v/c)^2}$ would become $\sqrt{1-4}$ or $\sqrt{-3}$ or $\sqrt{3}\ \sqrt{-1}$.

Since it is usual to express $\sqrt{-1}$ as i and since $\sqrt{3}$ is approximately 1.73, we can say that for a particle traveling at the velocity twice that of light, Equation 3 becomes:

$$1.72mi = m_o \qquad \text{(Equation 5)}$$

Any expression that contains i (that is $\sqrt{-1}$) is said to be imaginary*, a poor name but one that is ineradicable.

It turns out, as you can see for yourself if you try a few random examples, that for any object travelling at superluminal velocities, the proper-mass is imaginary.

An imaginary mass has no physical significance in our own subluminal Universe, so it has long been customary to dismiss superluminal velocities at once, and say that faster-than-light particles are impossible because there can be no such thing as an imaginary mass. I've said it myself in my time.

But is an imaginary mass truly without meaning? Or is a mass represented by mi merely a mathematical way of expressing a set of rules not like the rules we are accustomed to, but rules that *still* obey the dictates of Einstein's special relativity.

Thus, in the case of games such as baseball, football, basketball, soccer, hockey and so on and so on, the contestant or contestants who make the higher score win. Yet can one say from this that a game in which the lower score wins is unthinkable? How about golf? The essential point in any game of skill is that the contestant who achieves

*See IMAGINARY THAT ISN'T, March 1961.

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the more difficult task wins—the more difficult task usually involves a higher score, but in golf it involves a lower score.

In the same way, in order to obey special relativity, an object with an imaginary rest-mass must behave in ways which seem paradoxical to those who are used to the behavior of objects with real rest-masses.

For instance, it can be shown that if an object with an imaginary rest-mass increases in energy, its velocity *decreases*; if it decreases in energy, its velocity *increases*. In other words, an object with an imaginary rest-mass will slow down when a force is applied and speed up when resistance is encountered.

Furthermore, as such particles add energy and slow down, they can never quite slow down to the velocity of light. At the velocity of light their mass becomes infinite. As their energy decreases to zero, however, their velocity increases without limit. A body with imaginary rest-mass, which possesses zero energy, would have infinite velocity. Such particles move always faster than light and Feinberg has suggested thay be termed "tachyons," from a Greek word meaning "fast."

Well, then, the tardyon-Universe is subluminal, with possible velocities ranging from 0 for zero energy to c for infinite energy. The tachyon-Universe is superluminal, with possible velocities ranging from c for infinite energy to ∞ for zero energy. Between the two Universes is the luxon-Universe, with possible velocities confined to c, and never either less or more, at any energy.

We might view the total Universe as divided into two compartments by an unbreachable wall. We have the tardyon-Universe on one side, the tachyon-Universe on the other side, and between them, the infinitely-thin but infinitely-rigid luxon wall.

In the tardyon-Universe most objects have little kinetic energy. Those objects that have great velocities (like a cosmic-ray particle) have very little mass. Those objects with great masses (like a star) have very little velocity.

The same is very likely true in the tachyon-Universe. Objects with relatively slow velocities (just slightly more than light) and therefore great energies must have very little mass and be not too different from our cosmic-ray particles. Objects with great masses would have very little kinetic energy and therefore enormous velocities. A tachyon-star might be moving at trillions of times the velocity of light, for instance. But that would mean that the mass of the star would be distributed over vast distances through tiny time intervals so that very little of it would be present in any one place at any one time.

The two Universes can impinge and become detectable, one to the

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other, at only one place—the luxon wall at which they meet. (Both Universes hold photons, neutrinos and gravitons in common.)

If a tachyon is energetic enough and therefore moving slowly enough, it might have sufficient energy and hang around long enough to give off a detectable burst of photons. Scientists are watching for those bursts, but the chance of happening to have an instrument in just the precise place where one of those (possibly very infrequent) bursts appears for a billionth of a second or less is not very great.

Of course, we might wonder whether there might not be some possibility of breaching the luxon wall by some means less direct than accelerating past it—which is impossible (that's all). Can one turn tardyons into tachyons somehow so that suddenly one finds one's self transferred from one side of the wall to the other without ever having gone through it? (Just as one can combine tardyons to produce photons and suddenly have objects moving at the velocity of light without having been accelerated to it.)

The conversion to tachyons would be equivalent to the entry into "hyperspace," a concept dear to the hearts of s.f. writers. Once in the tachyon-Universe, a spaceship with the energy necessary to go only a tiny fraction of the velocity of light would find itself going (with the same energy) at very many times the velocity of light. It could get to a distant galaxy in, say, three seconds, then turn back automatically to tardyons and be in our own Universe again. That would be equivalent to an interstellar "Jump".

In connection with that, though, I have an idea which, as far as I know, is completely original with me. It is not based on any consideration of physical law but is purely intuitive and arises only because I am convinced that the overriding characteristic of the Universe is its symmetry and that its overriding principle is the horrid doctrine of "You can't win!"

I think that each Universe sees itself as the tardyon-Universe and the other as the tachyon-Universe, so that to an observer from neither (perched on top of the luxon wall, so to speak) it would appear that the luxon wall separates identical twins, really.

If we managed to transfer a spaceship into the tachyon-Universe, we would find ourselves (I intuitively feel) still going at subluminal velocities by our new measurements and looking back at the Universe we had just left as superluminal.

—And if so, then whatever we do; *whatever* we do; tachyons and all, attaining or surpassing the velocity of light will remain impossible, that's all.

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Dr. Hiram Pertwee, formerly of East Randoph, Vermont, is surely one of the most colorful series characters in sf. His encounters with various pesky critters from outer space (the last was BONITA EGG, *September 1969) have formed a highly entertaining series, of which the latest begins below.*

FORMULA FOR A SPECIAL BABY

by Julian F. Grow

YOU KNOW HOW IT IS WHEN you're doing brain surgery and your mind wanders?

Now, I suppose strictly speaking I should of been paying more attention to what I was up to, which was removing a Sharps carbine from the skull of Jubal Bean. But hell, me being the only bona fide doctor in this neck of the woods since the late Rebellion, it's saw and stitch, saw and stitch all day long, sunup to sundown and long past on weekends and patriotic holidays. A man's entitled to a little time of his own, when he can grab it.

Name's Pertwee, by the way, Hiram Pertwee, M.D., the initials standing for Mailorder Diploma. From East Randolph, Orange County, Vermont, but I been in these parts, seems like, since long before I was born. Maybe that's why I was kind of woolgathering, it having been so long.

Besides, the case was pretty much routine for around here. What happened was a bunch of the boys was having a horseshoe game out back of the Owl Hoot Palace. Let's see, there was Moose Loomis, of course, and Luther Dilby, and Brace McKinistry and Deuce-High Magoon, who must of been having a bad run of luck at Red-dog, to be outdoors and pitching horseshoes and all. Don't recall when anybody saw old Deuce-High outdoors, not since the last time the Owl Hoot burnt down, six years back. And then he

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damn near burnt down with it, lugging that table out so's they could finish the hand.

Anyways, they was having this game and Moose Loomis, who is big and stupid, was about to fire off a horseshoe when Jubal Bean, who is the swamper at the Owl Hoot and little and stupid, come by a mite too close. Moose's horseshoe hooked Jubal right in the belt loop of his corduroys, and Moose, he never noticed, just flang the horseshoe, Jubal and all, at the far stake.

Well, the stake was this Sharps carbine with a cracked breech that somebody'd buried butt down and just about eight inches of muzzle showing. The horseshoe and Jubal went flying at it, and the horseshoe missed a mile, but Jubal's head lit on the stake and stuck there. It pretty well busted up the game, on account of the front sight got jammed in the hole and they couldn't get him off to finish up.

Luther Dilby, he can write and cipher pretty good what with being clerk at the Hotel de Borax Queen, and he thought maybe Jubal needed professional help, so they called me. I come down from my office upstairs next to the stage depot and had them fetch spades and dig the Sharps up, and lug Jubal into the Owl Hoot, three carrying him and Luther Dilby running alongside—he's a dinky feller, bandy-legged—holding up the Sharps sticking out of Jubal's head.

They laid him out on the bar. Deuce-High was pretty upset about the game getting interrupted like that, until Luther Dilby said if I couldn't fix Jubal they'd just poke the barrel through the rest of the way and bury him right back in the hole the Sharps come from. That way they could finish the match, and the late Jubal'd have a real nice monument over his grave, and useful too.

Shucks, I didn't think it'd come to that, me being a crackerjack doctor with a diploma from Dr. Gideon Faustus's Correspondence College of Internal, External & Lower Animal Medicine, all the way to Saint Louis. On top of that, I knew for a certainty Jubal Bean didn't have enough brain to get bothered by a little thing like a gun barrel. Hell, you could drive a bucket of railroad spikes into Jubal Bean's skull and never hit brain at all.

So it wasn't particularly interesting work. And after a spell I got sick of answering fool questions from all the jugbutts gathered around, and sick of listening to Deuce-High and Moose Loomis argue about how to score Jubal. Deuce-High claimed the horseshoe had missed the peg clean. Moose claimed that Jubal had got himself attached to the horseshoe and therefore was part of it, and ought to be scored like one.

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What with Moose being about the size of a cottonwood tree, Deuce-High was in a bad moral position, and after a bit it come down to whether Moose got points for a ringer or a leaner.

Like I say, my mind wandered. I got to thinking how long it'd been since I took a holiday, and I thought about going up into the mountains maybe, and I thought about hunting and fishing and all. And I thought about a little college-taught Indian gal I knowed with a way of carrying herself, and I guess her is what I was thinking of all along. I got to thinking about her so hard I nearly never heard Jubal's question at all.

Did I mention that pipwit never did have the sense to lose consciousness throughout, such as he regularly enjoyed, anyways? Well, he didn't—hell, most of the blame fool questions was coming from him. Things like "How's it goin', Doc?" and "How much longer you goin' to be, Doc?" and like that. Pipwit. The one I like to of didn't hear was, "Hey, Doc, is this goin' to make me some kind of droolin' idiot?"

"Why, bless you, my boy," I told him, kindly as I could, "I'm only a country doctor, not a miracle man. I don't know that we can expect any such improvement."

Fact is, I'd just about finished up by then. Moose and the rest had got their stake back and went to finish the game, and I warned Jubal to get a derby to protect the new soft place in his beezer, whilst I used a purse stitch to close up the hole. I bandaged him up and told him to take it easy a couple of days and, bowing to applause from the drunks down the bar, I got the hell out of there.

Packing the gear I meant to take up into the hills didn't take much time, but saddling up Poor Harry, my Morgan gelding, did. I ain't exactly sure what role Poor Harry figured the Creator put him on earth for, but it surely wasn't to be no horse. Saddling Poor Harry was pretty much like putting a nightshirt on a hurricane, and usually Jubal Bean done it, but I guessed I couldn't ask him to on account of he was in delicate health now. Hard lines, but this is a hard country. I done it myself.

By the time I got through we wasn't speaking, Poor Harry and me. I climbed aboard him and rammed both heels in his ribs, and we went out of town like we been shot from a Whitworth rifle. It was nigh three miles before I could get him slowed down, hauled around, and headed the direction I had in mind.

Well, that was about the way the first leg of the journey went, and that was why we got, oh, maybe four and a half miles the first day. Poor Harry takes a while

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to get into the spirit of a trip. We was barely into the foothills when it was time to camp for the night, and if it hadn't of been for that little Indian gal I'd of cheerfully rode on back home and shot the fool hammerhead soon as I was close enough to walk. But I kept on.

I found us a stream to bed down alongside. Wasn't no water in it, of course, it not being that time of year, but it did have kind of a tree by it. I tethered Poor Harry to the tree so's he could eat it if he was of a mind, and built myself a fire for to fry up some salt pork and beans. It was dark by then and the fire felt good, and the coffee was just commencing to smell pretty when Poor Harry snorted and pricked up his ears.

I heard the sound too. It weren't so much a noise as a kind of feeling at first, and then it become a hum. Then, while Poor Harry rared back against the tether, his eyes showing white, the hum got louder until it was like every bumblebee in Creation was on its way, and there was this sort of flashing light. And this thing come over the hills.

It flickered. The shape was half a globe, soaring my way maybe a hundred foot up, the light pulsing brighter and brighter, and then it come lower and lower, and finally the light glowed hard once more and winked out, and the thing set down on the ground with a thump, no more than thirty paces away. Then I seen a kind of loop on the back of it, like a boat rudder—what the thing looked like altogether was a cup fifteen foot across the rim, a flying cup.

The buzzing quit when the light went out, but Poor Harry kept yanking and hauling on his rope, whinnying. I didn't have no time to worry about him, though, for just then a door opened in the side of the flying cup, and a man got out and kicked the cup and hurt his foot.

Myself, I just hunkered there by the fire, hand halfway to the coffeepot and jaw in my lap. Some things you just ain't set for. But my mouth begun to dry out so I stood up and shut it, and had it shut when the jasper that'd just rid the teacup in turned around and noticed me. He started over.

I seen right off there was something funny going on, and when he spoke up I knew it. *"Guten Abend,"* he said. *"Ich heisse Herr Doktor Johann von Stern. Bitte, wollen Sie mich . . ."*

"Come off it, pilgrim," I told him. "Talk American."

That set him back some, but like I said I was onto him. He sputtered and gabbled a bit, then said, *"Amerikanisch. So."* And he bowed and clicked his heels and went back to his teacup. He leaned in the door and rummaged

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around inside a while, and come up with what looked like one of them helmets the olden knights in the engravings used to do their fighting in, all gleaming and with kind of a comb on the top. He brung out a box too and fetched the kit and kaboodle back to the light of my fire, and set to pawing through what looked like soda crackers in the box.

They wasn't to eat, though. He'd yank one out and hold it up to the light like he was reading off it, and say something like *"Franzosisch . . . nein"* and put it back, or *"English . . . ach, sicher nichts"* or whatever, and take out another one. Finally he come to the one he was looking for. He slid it in a slot in the comb on his hat and put the hat on and pressed a button in the front, and stood frowning like someone was talking to him and he was listening hard, though I didn't hear nobody.

Maybe Poor Harry did, for he kept screeching like a banshee and sawing at his tether, his ears all laid back, his hooves dancing till I thought he'd haul that poor forlorn tree up by the roots. Then the feller from the teacup pushed the button again and took the pot off his head. He turned to me.

"What in thunder," he said, "is that?" And he pointed at Poor Harry.

"That's Poor Harry," I told him. Then I said, crafty, "Why, don't they have them like him where you come from?"

"Hell, no," he said. "Wait a minute . . . sure, we got them. Lots of them. Only I just never saw a Poor Harry before. I mean, I've seen them, lots of them, but never up real close. No, I mean, what I mean is I must have forgotten. It slipped my mind."

"Come off it," I told him again. "Poor Harry's a horse, more or less. You never seen a horse before, not even once, and you fly around, and you ain't from this world, you're from out of the sky someplace. Now, ain't that true?"

He stared at me blank-faced for a solid minute, then said one sharp short word I never heard before but knew what it meant. "All right," he said, "how did you know?"

"Hell, man, look at you," I said. "I never seen such an outlandish rig in all my born days. You didn't fool me one second." And that was so: he was wearing some kind of weird fuzzy hat with no brim worth talking about, and a shaving brush in the band. And his jacket was too short, and he had on leather pants that come barely to the knee, held up by embroidered galluses, and heavy wool stockings and funny shoes. Anybody could of told he weren't human.

He did look down at himself, though, and then glared up at me

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like he was sore about something. "Those imbeciles in L Section," he said. "They told me this was a common enough costume in this part of the country. This will go into my report, you can be sure." He got aholt of himself, and sighed. "What else can you expect from L Section?" he asked me.

I didn't rightly know. Then he said, "Well, we'll have to make the best of it, as usual, despite their blunder. Now then, can you guide me to Munich?"

"Munich," I said. "What's that?"

"Of course, Munich," he said, a mite testy. "It's supposed to be no more than five miles from here." He looked at me close, like maybe he thought I'd got what L Section had. "It's the major city of Bavaria, isn't it? We are in Bavaria, aren't we?"

"Not that I know of," I told him. "We're about two thousand mile from Batavia, New York, near Rochester, if that's any help. You better find somebody else to take you, though, on account of I got responsibilities. And the only town in these parts where they wouldn't get hysterical if you called it a major city is San Francisco, five hundred mile the other way. I never been there."

He looked at me. "San Francisco is in the United States of America," he said quiet.

"Right," I said.

"That would indicate that we, right now, are ourselves in the United States of America," he said, twisting that helmet in his hands.

"True," I said.

"And if we are in the United States of America," he said, "then it follows we can hardly be in Europe." His voice was commencing to thin out.

"Seems reasonable," I said.

"And if we are not in Europe, we can scarcely be near Munich, in Bavaria, in Germany," he said, beginning to quiver.

"That's so," I said.

"And if we are in the United States of America," he said, getting louder and louder, "and if we are not near Munich, in Bavaria, in Germany, which is in Europe—" he was pretty shrill by now "—which is where my assignment is, and which is where D Section assured me I was programmed to land—" he was whooping "—why, then I cannot do my damned ASSIGNMENT!"

And he flung the helmet down so hard it bounced twenty feet, spinning and shining in the firelight.

I could see he was worked up about something, so I didn't say nothing. When the helmet hit, though, the soda cracker he'd put in it popped out and I picked it up. It was transparent as glass, but with little flecks of what looked like gold all through it,

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and some kind of squiggle printed on one end. I decided to hang onto it till things settled down.

He come quick out of the seizure. "My God," he hollered, "I signed out for that thing!" And he rushed over to where the helmet'd lit, and picked it up like it was his very own egg, and dusted it off, and buffed it with the sleeve of his little-boy jacket, and laid it by the cracker box careful as crown jewels. When I spoke up he jumped like I'd never been there.

"Hey, whatever you are, want some coffee?" I asked him.

"Sure," he said, "and maybe some of that hot fluid in the pot, too."

"Boy, you sure ain't from around here," I told him, and fetched him a cup. "Where exactly are you from?"

"Golly, I don't know," he said. "I mean, the ship's out there someplace—" and he waved his free hand toward the night sky "—but when I think about how far away I am from home and mother, I get positively ill." He sniffed at the enamel cup full of boiling hot coffee and tossed it down like it was warm milk. "That's really awful," he said. "Can I have more?"

I poured it, and dished out beans and salt pork for me and him whilst I was at it. He hadn't never seen a fork before and wanted pretty bad to eat with the wrong end of it, but watched what I did and did it too.

Well, we begun to talk. It turned out he didn't have no name I could call him, only a letter in his alphabet and a long number after, like everybody else back where he come from: Dzhon *thirty-seven million something*. I figured it'd be easier to call him John.

John explained he weren't no regular explorer, like you'd expect to come out of a flying teacup from out of the blue. What he was, was some kind of lowly clerk in the government on the world he come from, and whoever it was decided such matters had decided John had a special knack for this here mission he was on. What the mission was exactly was a secret, though—and so was the knack so far, if it come to that.

"Well, John," I asked him, "is this here secret job likely to hurt this world? I wouldn't feel right about splitting my beans with nobody was going to do that."

"Gee, no," he said. "That is, I don't think so. Actually, I got the impression it might even be beneficial. Would be, in fact. In the long run. At least that's the impression I got." He looked solemn and mysterious.

Also, he looked mighty young. What you mean is, you don't have the faintest notion, I thought to myself. I seen officers something like him in the late War of

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the Rebellion, all business and bustle and busting with secrets, not one of which they knew what it meant. Errand boys, fact is, but no harm in them.

But if John wanted to be solemn, I weren't going to wreck it for him. Any case, just about then he shot to his feet like he'd been harpooned. "Jehoshaphat," he said, "I've got to check in! They'll be wondering where I am." He charged over toward the teacup, skidded to a stop, come back and scooped up the helmet and cracker box and heaved them into his machine. Then he grabbed some kind of doohickey from inside and fiddled with it, and listened to it like he expected it to say something. He had more damn things to listen to, telling him what to do.

Jehoshaphat, though—fancy them having that in the glass soda cracker I'd stuck in my pocket. For what it was, was almost the whole American language boiled down somehow into them little golden flecks, and when he put the right cracker in the hat, and the hat on his head, why, what it done was to teach him the language right then and there, in scarcely the time it takes to tell about it.

He'd told me that, and he told me too that he'd never flew in one of the teacups before. All he knew about it was that them nitwits in D Section, on the big ship out there someplace, was supposed to of fixed it so that all he had to do was sit in it until it landed. Then he was supposed to get out and be where he was supposed to be, near Munich, in Bavaria, in Germany. Not here.

I guess he was explaining that now to the doohickey in his hand, for he was getting kind of exercised, in a lingo I never heard before. He'd holler at it, and then shut up while it hollered at him, I'd judge, and then he'd holler, and so it went. Finally he bellowed the same short sharp word he'd said before, which I think I knew what it means, and after a breath added what "Sir" might sound like in that kind of talk, and heaved the doohickey back in the teacup.

"Anything wrong?" I inquired.

He glowered, then inhaled hard and sighed. "D Section," he said, like that said everything, and maybe it did. "They claim that the calibrations were precisely correct, and that I must be just where I'm supposed to be, in Europe. No possibility of error, they said, because load, course and duration of flight were all carefully calculated in advance—by veteran officers far superior in rank to me.

"Naturally, if I had exceeded the assigned weight limit that would upset the calculations, but of course I was fully aware of the possibility of severe disciplinary

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action if I were to do such a thing. And if I didn't, why then I must be in Germany. *Hoch der Kaiser.* Nitwits!"

He looked plaintive. "But I didn't, I swear. It's got to be just another one of their foul-ups. I didn't bring a thing extra."

"Well," I said, "how about your friend, there?" For I'd seen somebody move in the teacup's cabin.

"What . . . ." he said, and looked where I was looking. "Ha!" he yelled, and reached in and hauled it out.

I never seen the like. What it looked like was a puma standing on its hind legs. And then I seen that its legs wasn't like a puma's, but jointed just like a human's despite all that tawny hair and the long tail. And then I seen that for all of being covered with fur, the face weren't like a puma's, neither. And I seen that for all of pumas being mammals, this one weren't set up like a puma in that regard, neither.

And I seen that even if having no clothes on didn't bother her none, it did me, a little.

John, he never gave that a thought, I guess. Nor said a word to her, nor even looked at her, just hung onto her wrist or paw or whatever. "See this?" he asked me, mad as hops. "You see this? You know what this is?"

I allowed as to how I didn't, exactly.

"This is the reason I'm not in Bavaria right now, doing what I came to do," John said. "This is the extra weight that idiot in D Section was talking about, the overload that would throw their settings off. It must have sneaked aboard and hid in the cargo compartment while I was getting ready.

"How," he said, getting a mite oratorical, "is this going to look in the report, do you imagine? What do you imagine those grinning apes in D Section are going to say? What would you say the section head is going to report to the ship commander, and the ship commander to the head of operations back home? And just what do you suppose that thundering great fathead is going to say to the fathead that runs my department?

"Oh," John said, going theatrical, "I can see it now. The little memorandum from department to sector to division, right into the lap of my very own section head, the idiot, with all those cheerful little endorsements. Can you see my next aptitude evaluation? I can, let me tell you. Very clearly. My chances for promotion—those I can't see, let me tell you.

"And all because of . . . of —" he twitched her wrist "—of this!"

"It don't seem to me," I observed, mild enough, "that you

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should be talking about her to her— um, face like that, John. Even if she did snarl up your plans a hair. A bit, I mean. Who is she, anyhow?"

He dropped her arm like it'd gone hot. "My goddamn nurse, that's who," he said.

"Beg pardon?" I said. I'd took him for older than that.

"Oh, my servant, my . . . slave, or whatever you call it. As for discussing it, it doesn't understand a word we're saying. Well, neither could I have a while ago, if it comes to that. But it's a primitive aborigine, little better than an animal, incapable of understanding more than a few simple hand signals. Each of us humans has one, but I swear they're more trouble than they're worth, and this proves it."

Maybe so, but I'd noticed a kind of flicker in her eyes, downcast as they was, that you don't get from the general run of beast. And still, when he finally turned to her and waved his hand a special way, she went off a piece and sat quiet enough on a rock, watching him.

He'd simmered down somewhat by then. "Oh, hell," he said, "I suppose it was only trying to do what it's trained to do. They're always wanting to help and only getting in the way. Sometimes I don't know who's the master and who the servant, or which is taking care of the other."

"Uh huh," I observed. "What's her name?"

"Name? I don't know that it has one," John said. "I've had— why do you keep calling it 'her'? Is it a female really? Strange, it's been around since I was a youngster and it was a pup, but I never noticed.

"I've never had to use a name. It's just forever there."

On a hunch I went over to her and hunkered down by her, just staying quiet for a spell whilst she got used to my being there. Finally she left off staring at him and looked straight at me, only glancing his way from time to time to make sure he didn't need nothing.

I pointed at him. "Dzhon," I said. I pointed at my own self. "Hiram," I said. And then I pointed at her and waited.

It was hard to tell but it looked like she was making up her mind under all that fur. Then she nodded at John. "Dzhon," she said, in a nice, husky voice, almost a purr. She nodded at me and said what sounded like "Chrrum," which was close enough. And then she said, "Chti."

I felt like scratching her behind the ears but didn't. I got up and went over to John. "Her name's Kitty," I said.

John couldn't of cared less, for he was back to brooding about how he stood with the chain of

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command. Finally he sighed—young men sigh a lot, and got a lot to sigh about—and got up from the fire. "Might as well get it over with," he said, and fetched the thing he'd talked into before, handling it like it was the noose for his own hanging.

"I can see that memorandum now," he muttered, and did whatever it was made it talk.

Apologies sound like apologies in whatever foreign tongue, and one was what he started out with. I seen he was going to be at it for a while, so I went back to Kitty and took her hands and lifted her to her feet, and taught her how to tend a fire. She picked it up right quick, considering she never went long without looking to see maybe John needed his nose wiped or something.

When we'd been at the fire a bit, though, her nose, which was pink and bare like any cat's, begun to wrinkle, and in a shy way she hand-signaled she'd just as liefer have some of the pork and beans in the skillet, if it was all the same with me. Well, hell, I didn't know but what she had fangs so I give her some.

For a feline she ate real neat, once she'd got the ends of the fork sorted out—no better than John had, but no worse neither. When I poured her a cup of coffee, hot and sturdy enough now to etch steel, she tossed it down just like he had, without even blowing on it. They must have brass necks where John and her come from.

Then she glanced up once more like she'd been doing all along, to find the boss, and when she did her eyes widened and she dropped the cup. I turned around and there was John, looking grim and apologetic and scared and about ten years old, and throwed down on me with what was a handgun in any language. I didn't move.

"You've got to understand," he said, pleading though it was him had the iron. "I'm just a junior clerk detached to a military unit. I've got to do what they say, even if they can't see, refuse to realize what the situation is. I tried to explain, truly I did, but . . ."

"My boy," I said, "I ain't especially ready to meet my Maker in any case, but I sure don't aim to be talked to death. If those people up there said shoot me, why, get it done."

John looked shocked. "Oh," he said, "it's nothing like that. Good heavens. I tried to explain that because it was aboard the flyer I'd landed in the wrong country. They said I'd have to handle minor hitches myself or face a court-martial. They said my orders call for me upon landing to locate a guide to take me to Munich, and that since I seem to have found one, to get on with the mission."

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"Hold on just a dadburned minute . . ." I begun, but he weren't paying attention.

"I tried to explain," John said, "how you were an American and not a German, but they thought that was a petty distinction. I told them we are thousands of miles from where I'm supposed to be. Maybe I should be thankful at least that much seemed to sink in, because they did tell me how to set the flyer controls to take us both to Bavaria. Maybe I should be thankful but I'm not."

"Me neither," I told him, "because I ain't going. Besides, what about Kitty here?"

"As a matter of military necessity I'm supposed to turn it loose," John said. "And, yes, you are going, because those are my orders. Military orders."

"I'm a damn civilian," I said, and socked him on the jaw. He went down like a sack of sash weights.

Well, it's just as well Kitty didn't turn out to have no fangs, because she'd of tore me apart with them. As it was I had a regular bobcat on my hands, she being upset about me belting John, and I ain't very proud of the way I calmed her down. I socked Kitty too.

So there I was with the two of them poleaxed and me with some decisions to make. I weren't especially worried about John since I've handled his kind, earnest but sometimes sort of stupid, before—and besides I had his pistol or whatever tucked under my belt. Kitty was the one had me dubious.

Finally I decided on a gamble. I went to the teacup and dug out the language helmet, and I fetched my saddle rope and hogtied Kitty so's she couldn't move a muscle, once she come to. Then I brung her around with a whiff of aromatic spirits of ammonia from my doctor bag.

After her brain cleared she tried once against the rope, saw it weren't no use, noticed nobody was dead yet, and settled back with her eyes—slanted, green eyes—steady on me, waiting. I showed her the helmet, and saw she knew what it was for. I pointed to her head, and then to my mouth. After a minute she nodded.

Fur or no, this was one female didn't do a lot of talking. I hoped the helmet wouldn't change that none.

I eased it on her head, slid the American language cracker from my pocket into the slot, and pushed the button in front, and waited while her brow furrowed with concentration on whatever it was the helmet did. Finally she looked up at me.

"You can turn the apparatus off now, Hiram," she said. So I did. The first part of the long shot had paid off.

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Now for the second part. "If I untie you," I said to Kitty, "will you stay quiet while I explain what in tunket is going on around here, and why I had to smack John?"

She didn't answer right off, which I took to be a good sign. Then she nodded, and I unleashed her. She rubbed where the rope had bound tight whilst I brought her another cup of coffee as a peace offering.

"Now," I said, "I'm right sorry about having to hit you and tie you up, but there is things that John and me was talking about that you didn't understand before, not savvying American then. You know what John is here for, what his assignment is?"

She nodded. "I'm not supposed to, nor of course was I supposed to steal aboard his flyer," she said in that velvety voice. "But I do know that he has a thing to do in a place called Germany, and that this is not Germany, and that you are to take him where he is to go. Some I overheard aboard the big ship before we left, and some I heard him say when he was talking to the big ship just now."

"Did you know he was told to leave you here?" I asked her.

She didn't answer for a spell. "No," she said in a small, sad voice, "I didn't know that."

We both sat staring into the fire a while. "It does not matter," she said, finally. "Whatever happens to me, you must help him do what he is to do in Germany. It will be very bad for him if you do not, Hiram."

Whatever I was going to say then I never did, for John begun to stir. He thrashed a mite, and babbled, and said very clear, "Ay glike emm say hoke swy." I looked at Kitty but she was just as puzzled as me. Then his eyes opened and he sat up groaning and rubbing his jaw. He saw us, and all of a sudden his pride hurt worse than his chin.

"You going to make trouble, John?" I asked him. "On account of I don't know how to work your gun, and my hand still hurts from reasoning with you back a while. I'd hate to have to get up and dig out my Merwin & Hulbert and plug you, if you was going to make trouble, John."

"He will not make trouble," Kitty said quick, but John acted like he never heard.

"No," he said, his voice very tired, "I won't make trouble. What are you going to do now? It doesn't really matter any more what happens to me, but there's no need for harm to come to . . ." and he kind of dwindled off.

"Well, I been thinking about that," I told him. "Kitty, would you fetch John a cup of that coffee, and me too if you don't mind? Now, John, you say this business you got in Germany

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ain't going to hurt the world?" He nodded, and took the cup from Kitty without really noticing she was on the other end of it.

"Thanks, honey," I told her when she passed me mine. "Well," I went on, "I was just setting out on sort of a holiday when we met up, John. Strikes me that if what you got to do ain't going to do no harm, and that if you don't do it you'll be in a peck of trouble—why, I don't see any particular reason why I can't take my holiday in Germany, all things being equal. I never been there.

"Only one thing. We got to take Kitty into town and find a place for her to stay. None of this turning her loose, John."

Shoot, if he'd of had a tail he'd of wagged it, he was that grateful. Kitty did have a tail, but the look in her eyes was enough. Between the two of them I damn near got sick of how nice I was.

There was still a power of planning to do, though. We talked about it on the way into town. For one thing, John had on them silly leather short pants, and I was going to have to find him some decent trousers. For another, we had to settle on some safe place for Kitty. And for another, she had all that fur. It might cause talk.

One more thing it didn't seem I could do anything about. Kitty didn't say much on the way in, but every once in a while she'd get something off and it usually was pretty sensible. But it was like John never heard, and I had to repeat it like it was me that said it in the first place. His kind and her kind didn't talk, back where they come from, and I guess by God they wasn't going to now.

By the way, Kitty was riding Poor Harry, and for once he didn't resent being rid. She'd introduced herself to him before getting aboard, just like you're supposed to do for all of her never seeing a horse before, and the damn-fool hammerhead went prancing off with her on his back like he was a grain-fed park pony. It was enough to turn your stomach.

I left Kitty and John in a cottonwood clump outside of town to go in and scout up some clothes, and when I got back with pants for him and a calico dress and poke bonnet for her, they still hadn't spoke a word to each other, unless maybe in sign language. But with the clothes and Kitty keeping her tail curled around one leg—she did tolerable in clothes considering she'd never wore none before—they'd pass as people if we kept to the shadows, and that was the main thing.

I'd decided on the hotel as the place for her to stay, on account of Sidney, the son of my landlady at the Elysian Fields Boarding

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House, was just getting over scarlet fever. If she kept to her room and had meals brung up, she'd be OK, and if worst come to worst, she could shave. Besides, I wasn't too sure about how my landlady, Young Widder Purity Poplowski, would cotton to any female friend of mine, with or without fur, her having more or less set her cap for me.

So it had to be the hotel. We damn near made it, too.

The two of them stayed out of the light from the porch lamp at the Borax Queen whilst I snubbed Poor Harry to the hitching rack and went on in to distract Luther Dilby, the night clerk. Luckily, there wasn't the usual loafers and bums on the porch and only one drummer passed out in the lobby, and I was able to engage Luther in conversation about a certain personal problem he had while Kitty and John come in quiet and started up the stairs.

Trouble is, a miner about three-quarters through his pay come staggering down just then. Now, I'd told Luther the pair of them was friends from Saint Joe, Missouri, which was not quite accurate, and I'd registered them in, and was heading for the stairs myself when they stopped on the landing to let the drunk stumble by. There was a lamp hanging there, and when the miner went past he peered into their faces, like drunks sometimes do. Maybe hoping they'll find theirselves under somebody else's hat.

Anyways, when he looked under the brim of Kitty's bonnet, he let out a whoop.

"Hey, lookee what we got here," the confounded jughead yelped. "A bearded lady! Shircus mus' be in town. You one o' the freaks, sweetie?"

Now, I'd be willing to lay a double eagle to a peach pit that Kitty didn't have no notion at all what a bearded lady was, nor a freak, nor a circus neither. But ladies got ears sensitive to matters like tone of voice, and the thing there was that when she got mad —like she'd been at me for popping John—her tail stood straight out.

It did now. The miner, he leaped back gargling, which is not smart on a stair landing. He lit on his shoulderblades halfway down and slid the rest of the way bouncing, and that was some satisfaction, but by then the damage was done. It's a wonder to me how quick a dead town can turn out a crowd when somebody hollers.

I'd dove for the stairs straightaway, of course, coming down good and hard on that fleabrain miner on the way, but before I got to the landing the lobby was full of idiots going "What was that?" and "What bearded lady?" and "Who got killt?" And Luther Dilby was right in the middle.

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I shooed Kitty and John up the rest of the way and down the hall to the bridal suite Luther'd gave me the key to, which would of handed John something to think about if he'd knew it. The pack was boiling up the stairs hard on our heels. I busted into the room, and as soon as the two of them was through the door, I slammed it and locked it and leaned back against it to catch my breath, the knotheads outside already pounding on the panels. And it was then I seen we wasn't away quite clean.

Kitty was standing there kind of funny. For I had slammed the door on her tail.

She wasn't saying nothing, mind, but she wasn't too happy neither. And we was in a bind, for if I opened the door to free her, every braying jackass in tarnation'd be in on top of us and the fat in the fire for sure.

Wasn't time for no council of war on the matter, neither, for those lunks was quite capable of smashing the door down just to satisfy their curiosity. We had to get out of there and so I done the only thing I could. I whipped out my Russell Barlow knife and bobbed her on the spot.

That girl winced but she didn't whimper, just waited to be told what to do now. I went to the window and for a marvel was able to raise it, and for another marvel found it opened on a side porch with steps down to the street. The uproar in the hall was mounting, and the door commencing to shake.

"Go down this side street to the next corner and turn right," I told Kitty. "Third house on the left is the Elysian Fields Boarding House. Go in and tell the lady I sent you. Widder Poplowski. You can't hardly miss the place, for there's geraniums in the windowbox and a quarantine sign on the door. I'll be along as soon's I can. I know I should be telling your boss this, but sometimes he ain't very bright. Now skedaddle."

They went, and I just had time to see them take the right turn when the door busted in. Luther Dilby was leading the bunch that come stampeding through, Kitty's poor hacked-off tail in his hand. "Where's the bearded lady?" he yelled.

I looked reproachful. "If you are referring to the newly wed Mr. and Mrs. Abner J. Waldo, who come here on their honeymoon expecting to find the privacy that civilized people generally extend to couples in their delicate condition," I said, "they have just fled out this here window and are probably halfway back to Saint Joe by now. I can only hope that there they are spared the attention of ruffians like yourselves, and that unfortunate cross-eyed sot downstairs, rest his soul.

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"Ah," I said to Luther, snatching Kitty's tail from out of his hand, "I see you found the bride's fur piece, a treasured gift from her parents. I will see she gets it back, for she was quite attached to it."

It was then I seen a familiar head bobbing around in the back of the crowd, trying to see and standing out because of all the bandages. "You, Jubal Bean! You're supposed to be sick. Get the hell back to bed, and the rest of you clear out too!"

Nobody ignores a doctor when he lifts his voice, and they all shuffled out. I made myself a promise to slip a little cayenne pepper in the next batch of ointment I made up for Luther Dilby, and as soon as they was gone, I cut out the window headed for Widder Poplowski's.

Well, to make a long story short, when I got to the boarding house everything was hunky-dory. The Widder and Kitty was hitting it off famous—by discreet inquiry I found the Widder'd treated Kitty's wound, and she didn't care to have the tail back—and except for John being a nervous wreck, we was in good shape. Next day him and me set out afoot for his teacup and our mission to Germany.

Considering it was the first time I'd flew, me or anybody else I knew of locally for that matter, the ride to Bavaria, Germany, was pretty dull. I mean, on a ride like that you either die right off or you don't, and afterward you're too high up to see. What it's really like is that nothing's moving, but you end up someplace else.

One thing, though, was I got to wear the helmet and learn how to talk German. That was funny, because all of a sudden I knew all these here foreign words I didn't know before—even German words for things I didn't know American for. I'd of liked to try the American cracker, just to see what would happen, but I didn't say nothing because I'd left it in my other suit and didn't want to tell John.

It only took us about three and a half hours to get to Germany, and I wouldn't be surprised if that was some kind of record for the trip. John didn't have nothing to do, once he'd made the settings they told him to, and that's just as well because he didn't know any more about the teacup than me. We set down in this little clearing amongst evergreens without neither of us lifting a finger, nor untoward incident of any kind.

Except we damn near scared the little leather pants off a farmer dressed the same way John was, of course. L Section had said my reglar duds could do in a pinch, and that must of been right because after the farmer come to, he didn't bat an eye.

John give him that same *"Ich heisse Herr Doktor Johann von*

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Stern" business he'd gave me, only now I knew he was telling his name, of course, and I understood all the rest of it about being taken to this address in Munich. Truth is, John seemed a little put out when it developed the outskirts of Munich really was only about five mile away, for he wanted to get something on D Section. Not that his spirits wasn't good by this time, what with us being close to doing his chore.

He had a story for getting in the house once we'd got to it, but what happened was that the farmer took us to the village magistrate, and the magistrate took us to Baron von Whatever, and the baron took us—oh, I begun to lose track about there. Upshot was, though, he was in for about a week of interviews and audiences and I don't know what all. Seems that the yarn R Section had fixed John up with, about the teacup being an experimental gasless observation balloon dreamed up by the Imperial General Staff in Berlin, opened a lot of doors.

Too many. M Section, which it turned out had people all over our world keeping an eye on things, hadn't figured on all the ceremony, foofaraw and delay. Every day we went back to the teacup to report on the doohickey, the ship commander got a little feistier, until finally he told John to skip a pink tea or two and get on with the job.

I asked John how come if M Section had its own Pinkertons in the neighborhood, they didn't use one of them to do whatever had to be done.

"I'm not sure. Maybe it's not in their duty description," he said. "All I know is that they tested a bunch of fellows in my section, all of us either fathers or the oldest brother in a large family. I'm not married, of course, but I do have four younger brothers, six younger sisters, and one we're not sure of yet. And then I got chosen.

"Perhaps it's got something to do with voices, though, because they had us do a lot of talking in the tests. Maybe what I've got to do takes a special kind of voice, and I'm the only one that had it. Hell, Hiram, who knows why those chuckleheads in T Section make their selections?"

All in all, it took me back to the army. Don't ask how to do it, or why it has to be done, or why you're the one that has to do it—just get it over with and report back right away.

Which reminded me I still didn't know what we was here to do. Every time I asked him about it he got all mysterious and solemn, and give me a lecture on official secrets. I would of clubbed him, only I liked him by now and he was so young. But now we'd been told to bust on through with it, I asked him one more time.

He started to go tedious, and

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then shrugged. "All right, I'll tell you as much as I know," he said. He cleared his throat. "I've got to say something to a baby."

After a minute I said, "What it seemed like you said, John, was that you come a million or so miles and me a few thousand, and went to all this trouble, and Kitty lost her tail, just so's you could say something to a baby."

"That's right," he said.

Damn if I'd ever ask him again.

Well, it so happened we had that very afternoon open on our social calendar, a countess having been took with an indisposition—which is pretty rarefied going for an East Randolph boy that used to figure Fourth of July was the high point of the year. Anyways, we finally had some time to ourselves and the word from on high to boot, so we decided to go right into Munich and get it over with.

John reached under his jacket—we was in the duke's brougham, by the way, with the side-curtains up because it was raining, and we'd already told the driver where to go—and took out what looked like a stethoscope. Well, it looked like a stethoscope with a shiny black turnip on it.

"I put the earpieces on the baby's head, and then I talk into this end," John said, staring at it.

There didn't seem to be anything more to say after he said that, so I looked out the window. We'd been going through farms and fields with woods between, but now the funny little houses with tall chimneys and tile roofs begun to get more frequent. Pretty soon the horse's hooves rung on cobblestones, and we was in town.

The driver'd reined up and was telling us through the little window that this was the place when the door of the house we was in front of burst open and this woman come shrieking out. "Are you the doctor?" she wheezed, spotting the medical bag I always carry because it's got my Arbuckle coffee in it. "Oh, thank God, you're here. Please hurry, please!"

Well, I would of gone anyway, she was in such a state, but John nudged me. "That's the address," he whispered. "What a lucky break! Unless those devils in M Section . . . no, they're not that clever."

"Maybe so," I whispered back, "but let's get the hell inside before the doctor they really did send for shows up." We run through the rain up the stoop to the door the fat lady was holding open for us.

She showed us up a flight of steep stairs and down a hall to a front bedroom, and all the way to it I could hear a baby gasping and about six different kinds of female having hysterics. They like to swooned in a group when I come in, 'though I heard one, a vinegarish old maiden aunt or I miss my guess, say, "Where's his silk hat?" Was they going to hold out for Mr. Lincoln?

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Before we'd even got to the room I said to John, "From the sound of that breathing I'd say he swallowed a two-cent piece. Maybe a penny, but my professional judgment is a two-cent piece. Nickels got a different rasp to 'em."

What I said when we got to the crib—in good German, of course—was "Everybody clear out." Not only did I need elbow room to work in and no wailing women around, but this was the child we'd come all this way to see. It took some doing, but John finally rounded them all up and herded them out, and closed the door on their hooting.

While he was doing that I was hauling the little tyke up by his heels and whaling him on the shoulderblades. Finally he hiccuped and this copper coin come shooting out. I still got it. A two-pfennig piece, but I should of remembered we was in Germany.

That done, naturally, the kid lost his mottled purple tinge and commenced to yell about being hit like any normal baby would. I held him a while, patting his back, and got him gentled down and back in the crib. Then I turned to John. "OK, John," I said, "Your deal."

But John was standing there with his hand to his neck, his mouth working and no sound coming out. He'd either got a sudden seizure of laryngitis, or a fit of stage fright, which was more likely. Or maybe he'd swallowed a coin too—a dollar, judging from the sight of him. "I can't," he managed to whisper, his voice like wind through cornstalks. "You'll have to do it."

"Do WHAT, you eternal ninny?" I said. "You'd never tell me what it was you're supposed to say." So he told me, and I put the turnip stethoscope over the baby's ears and said into the other end what he said to say, and altogether felt like the biggest fool under the sun.

I barely had time to whip the dingus off the kid's head and heave it back to John before the door busted open and the whole platoon of yowling women come rioting in. A closed door just don't seem to mean much these days. They swarmed around the crib, in which the baby was cooing and blowing nice average spit-bubbles—he hadn't minded the stethoscope folderol a bit—and every last one of them begun howling harder than if he was dead.

The one in the bunch I took to be the mother was the most dignified of the lot. She stopped having conniptions a full five minutes before everybody else, and fell to telling me I was the greatest doctor in the world, and that Mr. Einstein, her good husband, would demonstrate his gratitude in a more tangible way than she, a mere woman could, but meanwhile . . . and so on, and on. And on.

It was all pretty rich praise for

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a job of work any halfway competent plumber could of done, and I had to get out of there. I grabbed John, who was also getting a good deal of admiration considering he hadn't even done what he come to do, and we left. On the way out we passed the real doctor coming up the front steps, and I looked at his silk hat and sneered.

So that was the way it worked out. What I'd said through the stethoscope into the little pink ears of Albert Einstein, 18 months of age, was the same thing John'd said after I flattened him at the campfire a week ago: "Ay glike emm say hoke swy," only now of course I knew it was really *"E gleich m c hoch zwei,"* though what $E=mc^2$ is supposed to mean to a baby, I swear I don't know.

Nor did John know. Except he said, on the way back, the stethoscope dingus was a device that made whatever was said into it penetrate deep into the memory of even an infant, so's he'd always remember without knowing where he'd got the idea. He might even organize all his thinking as a man around what had been planted that way, John said. Which was why the thing was kept locked up where he come from.

And he said he'd got the notion from talk on the ship that the $E=mc^2$ was a kind of test, because while whatever it meant was mostly right, it was a little wrong too.

The wrong part was somehow just wrong enough to make men think they had a limit on how fast and how far they could ever go, until they got smart enough to see the mistake. The right part was so powerful right that if we learned to live with it, we was ready to meet other worlds—and if we didn't, there wouldn't be no problem.

It all depended on what this world done with the formula when this baby was a growed man. For John said the people in T Section had told the people in M Section that this particular baby would amount to something someday. So here we were, and that was that.

And that's pretty much all of it. John and me, we figured our string was about run out on that observation balloon yarn, so we went straight from the Einsteins to the teacup and left for home without no sentimental Bavarian farewells. On the way back he talked to his bosses on the hollering machine, and they give him the impression if he rassled his butt back to the ship, both his career and his butt would benefit.

So when we got back to home, him and Kitty took off right away. Did I mention that Kitty had got scarlet fever while we was gone, and all her fur'd fell out except for her scalp? Sure enough. Thing is, John had went and got Kitty a present in Germany, a set of silver-mounted military hairbrushes, and

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now she didn't hardly have no use for them.

Whether it was that or whatever, when we did get back he started right in talking to her, John did, like he'd been doing it all his life. Made me wonder if sometime she'd tell him what she told Young Widder Poplowski when she was sick—that Kitty's people were a real ancient race where they come from, and John's people were kind of a come-lately offshoot, and that her people had been guarding and guiding them all this time almost like mother and child, with John's folk never the wiser. All I know is that when it come time for them to climb into the teacup, he handed her in first.

They waved, and the Widder and me waved, and they was gone up into the sky. It was like none of it never happened, except over in Germany a baby had $E=mc^2$ in his brain where it hadn't been before, and things might be different someday because of it.

Then there's two other matters. One is the caudal appendage I amputated off Kitty in the Borax Queen. It's still in my dresser drawer because I don't feel right about throwing it away and I don't know what the hell else to do with it. It's with those silver-mounted hairbrushes John traded me for a couple pounds of Arbuckle coffee.

The other is I'm thinking of specializing. Considering the work I done on Kitty and Jubal Bean, I might just change my shingle to read:

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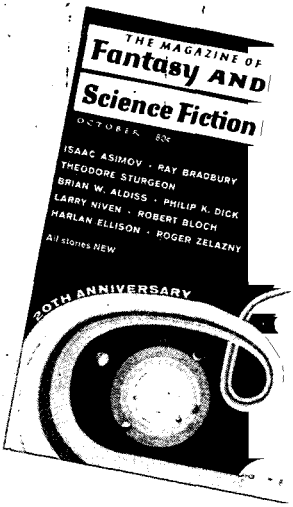

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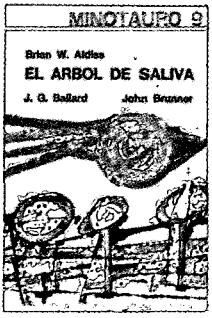

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